

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 13 May 2025**



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**Tuesday 13 May 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Bills*

**Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025**

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

**Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025**

*Royal assent*

**The PRESIDENT (12:03):** I have received a message from the Governor, dated 8 April:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:

**10/2025** Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2025

**11/2025** Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Act 2025

**12/2025** Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Act 2025

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Drought relief**

**Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04):** (893) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the South Australian government has been providing financial support to farmers affected by drought for months. It assists with freight subsidies, emergency tax rebates and mental health support. Why has the government ignored our farmers, who are feeding the state and are a vital part of Victoria's economy?

**Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05):** Ms Crozier, did you miss the \$13 million drought package announcement a couple of months ago? There is a drought support package that has been rolling out over the last couple of months. Minister Spence has been out in the south-west in particular meeting with farmers and listening to their concerns in relation to drought. The Minister for Agriculture, I and the Premier have all met with the president of the VFF in relation to these matters. You have asked the question to me, although I think you can anticipate that the Minister for Agriculture will have more to say very soon on that exact issue.

**Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06):** Treasurer, you are taxing our farmers, not helping them at a time when they need it most. The mental health burden is enormous. I have just spoken to farmers on the steps, who have told me the stresses they are going through. Will the government immediately waive the emergency services tax as South Australia has done?

**Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:06):** Ms Crozier, you have just asked me to waive something that does not exist. I understand the question that you are trying to ask, but you have actually asked a question that is nonsensical. But the serious issue is that there are farmers that are experiencing hardship as a result of drought. I live in regional Victoria; I am talking to these farmers every day. When it comes to support for farmers, there will be more to say in the coming days in relation to that. In relation to all of the measures that have been requested for us to look at I am having active conversations in relation to those exact matters.

### Housing

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:07): (894) My question is for the minister for housing. Community housing providers generally rely on a mix of different funding sources to be financially sustainable. This leaves the providers and residents or potential residents vulnerable when there are changes to those funding sources, such as when government programs are cut. Your federal colleagues have recently wound back access to the NDIS for people with complex psychosocial needs, a group already at very high risk of homelessness. Some community housing providers, such as those that provide supported housing to people with complex psychosocial needs, are being forced to reconsider their business models and their capacity to provide more housing. This highlights the significant vulnerabilities in the community housing sector. Minister, given the government's housing strategy relies on a massive expansion of community housing to provide Victoria's social housing, what assurances can you provide that the community housing sector has the capacity to deliver the quantity of housing your government is proposing given the inherent vulnerabilities in its funding models?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:08): Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for your question and for highlighting the priorities and the workload of the community housing providers, who are accredited through a really rigorous and consistent framework for the purpose of delivery of social housing for people on the social housing waitlist. One of the things that is really important to underscore in this discussion that we have and the broader work across governments at a state and a federal level is the work and the priorities of community housing providers in addressing the overarching need for people who are most vulnerable. They are not-for-profit, for-purpose organisations with charitable status. They operate to address the needs of and to provide supports to people across a range of specific areas of need, and you have identified people with complex mental health conditions as one of the groups which are supported by community housing providers.

I want to acknowledge the tireless efforts of community housing providers in meeting people where they are and providing supports which help people to move from homelessness, crisis and transitional housing into social housing that is secure, that is there for a long-term purpose, regulated by the Residential Tenancies Act, and that comes under a really significant part of the Commonwealth's priorities – to deliver the Housing Australia Future Fund, which again leans into community housing.

We do have a model for the purpose of funding which is intended not just to provide community housing providers with a rent revenue stream through the purpose of GST exemption and that Commonwealth funding envelope but also to make sure that they can access a range of other program-specific funding streams that exist when they are delivering services on top of that.

Community housing providers are in a position to deliver more housing at scale because of the settings that apply in the interface between state and federal funding allocations and streams. We are really determined to continue that funding and that support. As I have said to the Community Housing Industry Association – CHIA – and its members and as I have said to people in this chamber and to individual organisations when I meet with them and their tenants, we want to make sure that we are supporting this particular set of providers, because we cannot do it without them. We know that in order to address the shortage of social and affordable housing we need partners on board who are sufficiently resourced and equipped, who are sufficiently regulated and who have a clear imprimatur to do the work that they do, and this is where, again, the funding streams that we have will continue.

As part of our record investment across the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund – that is \$6.3 billion this year alone – we have allocated \$1.3 billion for social and affordable housing in Victoria. The work goes on, however, and this is where, again, the re-election of the Albanese Labor government will ensure that we can have those partnerships in place that are so integral to meeting demand.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:11): Thank you, Minister, for that response. Getting back to my question, it is really about what happens to the housing providers and the residents if, say, access to a funding stream dries up – people with complex psychosocial needs who are no longer able to access the NDIS and no longer have the funding available to support their entry into community housing. This is potentially leaving a whole group of people with potentially no access to appropriate community housing. What is being done to ensure that those who lose funding streams like the NDIS can still access social housing?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:12): Thanks, Dr Mansfield, for highlighting an area of concern around vulnerability for people in the social housing system. Social housing is capped at 30 per cent of income for people who are in it and 25 per cent for public housing. It is long-term housing; this is not about evicting people. We have just recently debated legislation removing the right to evict without reason. This is about making sure we can provide support to people. Support may come in a variety of different forms, whether that is rent assistance or whether that is support for people who are receiving Centrelink benefits, disability support payments or other payments that in the aggregate comprise their income. We will not evict people where the income settings are 30 per cent of their income; that may well mean they are paying significantly below market rates. Just recently we had a deferral of the rent review to enable people to get access to the information they needed, including seeking rental relief and hardship assistance. Again, I am very happy to provide you with information on that, including as it relates to NDIS and other payments.

#### Ministers statements: housing

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:13): I am really, really pleased to be able to update the chamber on projects that our government is delivering in tandem with our recently re-elected Commonwealth partners, projects like the Bell-Bardia development at Heidelberg West, stage 1 of which will deliver 104 social and affordable homes and will go ahead thanks to funding from the Commonwealth and the Albanese Labor government's social housing accelerator program – that is \$497.5 million to deliver at least 769 homes. Construction on that project is expected to begin in the middle of this year, like the low-rise dwellings being delivered under that same program right across Victoria, including the newly built homes at Reservoir that I visited with the recently returned Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in April, alongside recently returned housing, homelessness and now cities minister Clare O'Neil and recently returned and promoted member for Cooper the amazing Ged Kearney.

These homes will be ready to be tenanted soon. They look absolutely stunning, like the slew of projects that we will soon see commencing under the Housing Australia Future Fund – that is a fund, by the way, that Peter Dutton was going to gut – which include Unison Housing's Sydney Road, Coburg, project, which is awaiting contract close and will deliver 59 social and affordable homes.

All of these are possible because of the Housing Australia Future Fund and the social housing accelerator program, both now secure with a re-elected Albanese Labor government. The HAFF is a revolutionary program. It is supporting 40,000 new social and affordable homes right across the country, and it is backing in our \$6.3 billion Big Housing Build and Regional Housing Fund, which has seen over 10,200 homes either in planning, under construction or completed. We know that we have everything to gain from these partnerships, as do the people who deserve the right to a bright, beautiful, secure and energy-efficient home they are proud to call their own.

#### Education system

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): (895) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the Allan Labor government has secretly cut \$2.4 billion from the state's education system, the decision being made by a subcommittee of which you were a member. This will slice money from every government school in the state, putting agreed education objectives on the backburner. The state

government appears so desperate now that it is prepared to compromise the quality of our children's education. I therefore ask: do you support this government policy of compromising our children's future through school cuts?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am concerned it is asking for an opinion.

**David Davis:** It is asking for a fact – whether she supports the government policy.

**The PRESIDENT:** I take that, Mr Davis, as a point of order. I will call the Treasurer, and she can answer as she sees fit.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:16): Mr Davis, I reject the premise of your question. This is a government that has a strong record of supporting our schools in Victoria, particularly our public schools. When it comes to funding, year on year there are increases for our schools. We are upgrading schools right across the state. To reflect on your characterisation of this government, I would put that in contrast with one of my strongest memories of when I first came into this place 11 years ago – being lobbied by opposition members who had been in government for the previous four years about school upgrades that they had not managed to deliver in the four years that they were in government. It was unbelievable. I recall an amazing meeting with Peter Walsh within the first two weeks of being elected.

When it comes to funding increases, we have a commitment to funding schools to 75 per cent of the schooling resourcing standard in the life of the agreement. The Minister for Education has been on the public record. Those discussions and those negotiations are ongoing with the federal government. I am positive that with a Labor government in Canberra and a Labor government in Victoria we will have amazing outcomes for our students and for our teachers. We have a strong record, and we continue to be very proud about that.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:18): Everyone, including the Deputy Premier, understands that these cuts are real, and I say under the Allan Labor government's plan to cut school funding, Victoria will be eligible for less Commonwealth support. My question is: how much money is the Commonwealth government likely to cut from Victoria under the agreement, over the forward estimates, as a result of Victoria not meeting its commitments?

**The PRESIDENT:** My concern is the supplementary is asking about an action from a government other than the state government. Once again I will let the Treasurer answer as she sees fit.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:19): As I explained in my answer to Mr Davis's previous question, funding for education has gone up every single year, so to stand there and say there are cuts to education is not accurate. Victoria is investing \$5.5 billion in government school funding over the next decade. We have a commitment under an agreement to reach 75 per cent of the schooling resource standard. The federal government will contribute 25 per cent of the resource standard. But it is very important to point out that this is just one component of the investment into education. It is only one part. When you look at all of the other parts where kids need to learn and get the best outcomes, it also includes being a fantastic place in terms of capital.

In the last couple of years we have spent \$16.7 billion on capital improvements to ensure that teachers and students have the best environment in which to learn. In relation to the continued funding and to our increases, which keep going up each and every year, the education minister is currently engaged in those negotiations, and I would not want to pre-empt the outcomes of those negotiations.

### Sheep dipping

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:20): (896) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. Sheep dipping, also known as plunge or cage dipping, is a little-known farming practice where sheep are herded onto an inescapable lowering platform and fully submerged

in a formulated solution to prevent parasites. Sheep dipping can result in asphyxiation or suffocation from sheep getting trapped or overwhelmed in the dip solution, and unlike other jurisdictions, you do not need a licence to dip sheep in Victoria and only a voluntary code of practice exists. Will the minister implement a licensing scheme to better monitor and regulate this cruel practice in Victoria?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:21): I thank Ms Purcell for her question. This is a question for the Minister for Agriculture, and I will refer that matter to Minister Spence.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:21): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. Like many other agricultural practices, sheep dipping is designed with economics, not welfare, at the forefront, allowing for more sheep to be treated in the fastest time possible despite them not being able to swim or hold their breath for long periods. There are equally, if not more, effective alternatives, such as injecting sheep with ivermectin or other injectables, but they are rarely utilised, as it requires treating individual sheep rather than as a group. Will the minister take the opportunity to end sheep dipping in the new Animal Care and Protection Bill, which this government promised nine years ago but have allowed to languish on a desk, and replace it with these humane alternatives?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:22): Again, I thank the member for the question, and again, it will be referred to the Minister for Agriculture in the other place.

#### **Ministers statements: Ngamai Wilam**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:22): I rise to update the chamber on a significant milestone in the delivery of mental health services in Victoria, one that demonstrates the strength of cooperation between the Allan and the Albanese Labor governments. Last month the federal assistant minister Ged Kearney and I officially opened Ngamai Wilam, Victoria's first public residential eating disorder treatment centre, located in Armadale. Backed by \$16.9 million in investment from the Allan Labor government and \$13 million in capital funding from the Albanese Labor government, the centre is a powerful testament to our shared commitment to mental health and wellbeing. The name, Ngamai Wilam, which means 'Giver of Life House' in the Boonwurrung language, honours the cultural heritage of the land and reflects the centre's purpose to offer hope, healing and new beginnings. Operated by Alfred Health, the 12-bed centre will offer a 24/7 residential model of care for Victorians aged 18 and over. Ngamai Wilam fills a critical gap in our mental health system. It moves us beyond short-term hospital stays and emergency visits and will ease the burden on our busy emergency departments in hospitals. It will ensure that people get the right care at the right time in the right setting, and most importantly, it will save lives. With eating disorders on the rise in Victoria and across the country, the Allan Labor government is taking strong evidence-based action to strengthen prevention and early intervention and to enhance treatment, support and long-term recovery for people battling serious eating disorders.

#### **Drought relief**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:24): (897) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Farmers across the state are facing extremely dry conditions. It has been named the 'forgotten drought' due to the Allan government's appalling lack of support for our food producers. What action has the minister taken to expand mental health support in rural and regional Victoria to meet the increased demand for mental health support for farmers and their families during this forgotten drought?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:24): I thank the member for her question. I do take issue with the way that you have characterised your question, Ms Bath. We have just heard from the Treasurer about our government's commitment to making sure that we are supporting our farmers and our rural communities, who have faced unprecedented weather events, including of course the drought

conditions that we are seeing in the west of the state and indeed in parts of the central districts of Victoria.

We know that extreme weather events, including fires, droughts and floods, do have an impact on people's mental health in those communities, and they have done for a number of recent years. But I must say the Allan Labor government has been doing a power of work in making sure that we are opening new services, new mental health supports, right across the state. In fact there is no jurisdiction doing more than Victoria when it comes to investing in the mental health system and the mental health and wellbeing of our communities.

Can I just point to a number of new and free mental health services that are available across the regions, including new mental health locals at Latrobe, Wangaratta, Benalla, Mansfield, Bendigo, Ballarat and Greater Geelong. There are also a number of statewide telehealth support options, including Rural Health Connect, which is via [ruralhealthconnect.com.au](http://ruralhealthconnect.com.au), and Partners in Wellbeing via 1300 375 330. Support for farmers and small business owners includes the Rural Financial Counselling Service, and the National Centre for Farmer Health is supporting primary producers through the delivery of initiatives to boost farmers' mental health and wellbeing. People who may need to refer to more acute mental health supports can contact their area mental health service.

I will not touch on the drought supports, which are the purview of the Minister for Agriculture, but what I will say is that I would invite any member who has people in their communities who need to connect to mental health supports to get in touch with my office so that we can help facilitate contact with the local services that are available through our government's investment.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** It is very hard to hear the minister's answer. I will call Ms Bath for a supplementary. If she could be heard in silence, and then the minister will respond in silence.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:27): I thank the minister for her response, but they were standing out on the steps of Parliament, including the CWA president, very concerned about the mental health of farmers under your jurisdiction.

In April, Minister, the South Australian government announced the significant funding amount of \$73 million for a drought support package, which includes expanded mental health support. Why has the Victorian government been so slow to provide expanded mental health support for Victorian farmers facing the same drought conditions –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! That did not work too well.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Mr McIntosh! Ms Bath, can you ask the question so we can all hear it.

**Melina BATH:** Why has the Victorian government been so slow to provide expanded mental health supports for farmers facing the same drought conditions as their neighbours in South Australia and instead putting this government's efforts into implementing a new surrogate land tax that is putting even more mental health pressure on farmers struggling through this drought?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:29): I thank Ms Bath for that supplementary question, most of which falls outside of my direct portfolio of responsibilities, but it is disappointing because these are serious issues and we are very mindful of the mental health burden that our primary producers, people in regional Victoria battling all sorts of extreme weather conditions, are dealing with.

I have just gone through in some detail the services that are available, and that is just a snapshot of what we have been able to deliver in terms of the mental health system. I would again remind Ms Bath

that we have opened free and confidential mental health and wellbeing locals right across the state – I will not soak up my 9 seconds that I have got left with renaming those locations – on top of additional investment in youth mental health supports. I invite the member to ask me if there is any other information I can provide outside of the standing orders.

### Corrections system

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:30): (898) My question is for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, how can you justify spending \$727 million on Victoria's prison system when the net result is 200 fewer adult prison beds? Is this just a cover-up – a spin? Why?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:31): I thank Mr Davis for his question. I must add that I do reject the premise of that question. If you listened carefully to my announcement this morning, joined by the Premier and Minister for Police at our newest correctional facility, the Western Plains correctional facility out in Lara, in Victoria's west, in Melbourne's west, you would have heard that 1000 additional beds will be part of the system. That is on top of the announcements I made last year to improvements and additional beds. We were planning to have 600 beds open at Western Plains when I made that announcement, but we will now have over 1000. There will be additional beds across the system.

I know those opposite have been out of government for a long time, so you may not be familiar with the current state of the corrections system, but I might update the chamber and take this opportunity to update you that as a government we have made significant investments in the physical infrastructure, and now this announcement will allow us to build up the capacity, to scale up, as required. It means more frontline staff. It means better programs, targeted programs and doing it in a safe way to make sure we can meet the needs of those that go in. It means better support for staff. It means we do that in a structured way, and from the middle of this year we will have Western Plains operational. We will be opening up additional units across the system. I am glad that the Premier and Treasurer have backed me in on this, because we said community safety comes first, and that is why we are backing in our corrections system. We have already seen our bail laws come into effect and we are seeing an increase in the remand population, but we need to make sure we do that in a safe and structured way. That is what responsible government does, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): Minister, with a 22 per cent rise in the adult remand population and your government yet to implement bail law reforms, how can you possibly defend any reduction whatsoever in prison capacity when demand for beds is only going up?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:33): Thank you, Mr Davis, for that question and your interest in the prison system. If you listened carefully to my answer to the substantive, we are increasing the amount of beds available in the system. We are in the process of opening up our Western Plains prison – our largest maximum security prison – that will be able to accommodate up to 1300 prisoners. Part of today's announcement was about making sure we have the frontline staff. As the government we have done amazing work in investing in the infrastructure across our corrections system, and now we are investing in the staff to make sure we have frontline staff that are ready to go, because that is paramount and foundational to have a successful and secure system. That is what today's announcement was about. It is about more frontline staff. It is about more programs to make sure when people leave the system that they do not commit offences and the community is made safer. I am proud of the investments we have made, because many of them – in employment programs, in health programs – are in programs that are protective factors to ensure people do not recommit offences when they are back out on our streets. So we are doing that work – (*Time expired*)

**Ministers statements: International Nurses Day**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:34): Yesterday was International Nurses Day, and I would like to thank our healthcare heroes, who contribute so much. Our world-class TAFEs and universities are training the next generation of nurses, from La Trobe University campuses in Shepparton and Mildura to our newly opened Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute's Broadmeadows TAFE campus. Lee Tarlamis, a member for Southern Metropolitan, and I recently visited the health centre at Chisholm TAFE's Berwick campus. Free TAFE students in the diploma of nursing are receiving hands-on learning at Chisholm TAFE's new health centre in a state-of-the-art simulated hospital environment.

In Mildura I recently met Hannah, a free TAFE nursing student, who told me she had always wanted to be a nurse but wanted to wait for her three children to get a little bit older. In 2021 Hannah returned to study for the first time since 2006 at SuniTAFE in Mildura, studying a free TAFE diploma of nursing. I had the pleasure of meeting Hannah at her job in ward 2 at the Mildura base hospital – learning and earning. While working and caring for her three children, Hannah is now in her second year of La Trobe University's registered nurse program.

Free TAFE is removing the financial stress of tuition fees for thousands of health students in Victoria. Nurses are an inspiration, and I am proud that our government is making it a little bit easier to become a nurse with free TAFE. The great work will continue with Minister Giles, the Commonwealth Minister for Skills and Training, and we look forward to building those education and training pathways for jobs for all Victorians.

**Corrections system**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:36): (899) My question is again to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, given that 94 per cent of corrections staff voted no confidence due to staff shortages, extended lockdowns and rising safety concerns within the prison system, will the corrections commissioner be replaced?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:37): I thank Mr Davis for his question and his interest in our corrections system today. I think it is very important to state that every worker deserves to be safe in their workplace, especially our hardworking corrections officers. It is a challenging role, and I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to them. Two weeks ago I was at Dame Phyllis Frost, last week I was at Langi Kal Kal and today I was at Western Plains. Wherever I speak to workers, they do tell me about their concerns about staff safety, and that is why as a government we have not waited. We are introducing legislation today to strengthen the Corrections Act, to make amendments that will send a clear message that, where prisoners assault staff, it is expected that they will do additional time. We have also invested, throughout my time in this portfolio, in the physical infrastructure to support them. At Western Plains today it was great to hear from the general manager James Bulger, who was talking about the AI technology that will be in place that will support staff in managing the difficult cohorts that will be at Western Plains when it is fully operational. But I know that the commissioner – and I do have regular conversations with her – has heard the message loud and clear, and we are looking at options for what more can be done to support our corrections staff. The legislation we are introducing in the lower house today, the powers bill, will obviously receive passage and will come to this place, and I look forward to the opposition supporting that work.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): My supplementary question to the minister is: police commissioner Shane Patton was replaced two days after a no-confidence vote by the police association. Why have you as minister failed to do the same to the corrections commissioner?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:38): I thank Mr Davis for his question and

his interest in this matter. I think the vote is a clear message from staff that Corrections Victoria need to do more to keep people safe, especially their staff, and I know the commissioner has heard the message. I know the commissioner is committed to working with staff and renewing our efforts to focus on prisoner safety, and that is why we did announce a safer prison strategy, and we are working towards that. I cannot speak about other portfolios, because it was my understanding that those individuals in fact resigned or chose to go on leave, but I am firmly focused on supporting staff, and our investments today in the announcement by the Premier, me and the police minister reconfirmed that we are backing it up with real dollars, real investments, not just talking about staff safety. We have got legislative changes, we have investments in infrastructure, we will continue to do the work and work with our staff. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the corrections staff. It is National Corrections Day this Friday, and I will be with them.

### Police conduct

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:39): (900) My question is for the Minister for Police in the other house. On 17 April of this year Victoria Police officers fatally shot Abdifatah Ahmed, a 35-year-old Somali-born refugee, while he was homeless and experiencing mental health issues. His death has raised serious concerns about the aggressive style of policing and racial profiling of African diaspora and marginalised communities. Victoria Police's Indigenous inclusion action plan reveals 37 per cent of police employees have completed Aboriginal cultural awareness training. If two-thirds of the force have not completed the most prominent cultural program, what hope is there for cross-cultural understanding across other communities? Minister, can you please confirm whether anti-racism and cross-cultural training is mandatory for frontline Victoria Police officers and whether accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure equitable treatment of individuals, regardless of race and ethnicity?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:40): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for raising this important issue of public interest and express my deepest sympathies to everyone. It is obviously a very traumatic incident, and especially in the inner west it has affected many people – because I have had a lot of correspondence on this issue. I will make sure that question is passed on to the police minister for a response in line with the standing orders.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:41): Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. In the aftermath of Abdifatah's death, Minister, it is clear we still have a way to go in a postracial era of police institutions. African community leaders have been calling for a co-designed, African-specific cultural program to improve engagement with Victoria Police and address systemic racism. Given the clear failures in cultural competency and repeated incidents of racialised profiling, will the minister commit to funding this program in the upcoming budget?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:41): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for that supplementary question. I will make sure the supplementary question is passed on to the Minister for Police in the other place for a response. I will add, though, because you raised the issue of the African Australian community, that the department of justice does have strong relationships with members of the African community. I know in my portfolio we have done a lot of work with the South Sudanese community in particular; we have got a working group. I spoke to Dr Deng, met with him last week, and we talked about some of these issues. It is something that as a government we are committed to making improvements in across the justice system. But I will pass on that supplementary question to the Minister for Police.

### Ministers statements: bail laws

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:42): This morning I was thrilled to join the Premier and the Minister for Police at Western Plains Correctional Centre to show how the Allan

Labor government is backing in our tough bail laws. As part of the upcoming budget there will be an additional \$727 million to strengthen our justice system and back in those laws. We have been clear that the laws will lead to an increase in the number of people on remand and in prison. We have also been clear that we will be ramping up capacity as a result, and that is exactly what we are doing in this budget. With the additional \$727 million we will be able to activate an additional 1000 beds across the adult prison system, including 88 beds in youth justice centres. That means more frontline staff, more support for staff and more investment in programs to break the cycle of offending and make the community safer. This investment will create more than 700 new jobs in corrections and the youth justice system. This is an additional rollout on top of what I announced earlier this year.

I want to also talk about the \$8000 sign-on bonus for new staff at Western Plains, which will now be rolled out across the whole public prison system. I encourage anyone looking for a new career to take up an opportunity in corrections. These investments show that the Allan government is putting community safety first.

We are also introducing a new bill to crack down on prisoners that assault staff. Changes we are proposing to the Corrections Act 1986 will make it crystal clear that any prisoner who assaults and injures a corrections worker can expect additional prison time. We are making corrections workers safer and the Victorian community safer, because that is what the community wants.

### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT** (12:44): As he committed, Mr Erdogan will get the responses for Ms Gray-Barberio's questions to the Minister for Police in line with the standing orders – similarly, Minister Tierney for Ms Purcell's two questions to the Minister for Agriculture.

### Constituency questions

#### Eastern Victoria Region

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:45): (1538) My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight. Standing beside the padlocked gates, residents of Newhaven acknowledged the very first unhappy birthday of the closure of the jetty to the public on 1 May, rightly pointing out that in February, after a parliamentary debate led by the Nationals and commented on by the Liberals, divers conducted a structural inspection of the underside of the jetty and the pylons. This sparked interest that something is actually going to be done about saving this jetty, and my constituents want action. Will the minister release the engineering findings and cost estimates and collaborate honestly and transparently with the community as to a timeline for the jetty upgrades?

#### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1539) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. With National Road Safety Week underway, Victoria's death toll has already reached 106 this year. Tragically, a death occurred last week in Coburg between Bell Street and Elm Grove, despite my previous call for an overpass in this area. Key routes, including Urquhart Street and Elm Grove, are used multiple times daily by schoolchildren and families. The current signage and crossings have proven insufficient, and traffic volumes and unsafe driver behaviour continue to endanger lives. Over 500 Coburg community members have signed a petition calling for a safety review of the Coburg school precinct. Minister, given the area's history of pedestrian incidents, including fatalities and serious injuries, and an expected increase in traffic due to local developments, will you commit to an urgent comprehensive safety review of the Bell Street corridor between Sydney Road and Elizabeth Street?

#### Western Metropolitan Region

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:46): (1540) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding CO<sub>2</sub> levels from concrete use in government-funded building projects. Can the minister please update my constituents on if the government is using environmentally

friendly concrete options such as low-carbon concrete mix on their building worksites? I have been contacted by a constituent, Mr Bruce Lancashire, expressing his concern about the current concrete being used at government Big Build sites. The manufacturing of concrete contributes 7 to 8 per cent of global carbon emissions. The West Gate project alone, with 55,000 concrete segments, will greatly impact our environment. A recent study done by the University of New South Wales concluded that low-carbon concrete would not only be environmentally friendly but also reduce costs, a win-win, being both practical and sustainable. If the Allan government is serious about the environment and lowering carbon emissions, using low-carbon concrete should be on the table.

### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:47): (1541) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and concerns the Palmers Road corridor. My constituent lives in Taylors Hill and relies heavily on Calder Park Drive, Westwood Drive and Robinsons Road to get around. According to Moving Melton, an excellent advocacy resource by the City of Melton, 30,500 vehicles use this corridor every day, and traffic modelling predicts an additional 8000 cars per day by 2031. This busy stretch of road also saw 148 traffic accident related injuries between 2019 and 2024, including one fatality and 39 serious injuries. My constituent asks: will the minister consider Melton and council's plea to designate Calder Park Drive, Westwood Drive and Robinsons Road as Department of Transport and Planning managed roads and provide the necessary funding for upgrades?

### **Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:48): (1542) My constituency question to the Minister for Agriculture relates to the severe and prolonged drought affecting much of south-western Victoria. Bureau of Meteorology data confirms rainfall over the past 24 months is among the lowest 5 to 10 per cent on record, with many communities experiencing their driest 15-month period ever recorded. Agriculture is a cornerstone of Victoria's economy and food security, producing 23 per cent of the nation's output and supporting over 150,000 regional jobs. Feed and water are now so scarce it is difficult to keep animals alive. Without immediate support, the risk to rural livelihoods and supply chains is profound. The financial and emotional pressure on farming families is immense. Neighbouring South Australian farmers receive vital aid, yet Victorian producers lack equivalent support. Minister, will you accompany me to visit these drought-affected communities, hear their concerns and see what urgent targeted support is needed to protect their livelihoods and our food supply?

### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1543) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The North East Link toll road is due to be finished in around three years, is my understanding. Residents in my region have endured many, many years of dust and destruction during the construction of this road, and then once it is open they are going to be charged to use it. People are already struggling with cost of living; they are struggling with their housing, groceries, energy, transport expenses. These things are pushing people to the limit, and now locals in the north-east of Melbourne and beyond are going to be forced to pay to use this new toll road. So, Minister, my question is: just how much will people be paying in tolls on the North East Link?

### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1544) My constituency matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The newly released Suburban Rail Loop precinct plan for Box Hill has raised alarm bells in my community. Residents are deeply concerned that the Box Hill brickworks site, a rare pocket of open space, has been earmarked for high-rise development. As with much of the government's and the SRL's communication, it is almost impossible to get a direct

answer. There is obfuscation. We are nearing the end of the consultation period, but the local community actually do not know what they are being consulted on, because they cannot get a straight answer about this site. Can the minister confirm whether it is the government's intention to allow high-rise construction on the Box Hill brickworks site or not?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:51): (1545) My question is for the Treasurer. Will you confirm that the 2025–26 Victorian state budget will provide the funds necessary to build a new swimming pool in Rochester? The brave and resilient people of Rochester have been building back their lives after the devastating floods of 2022, but one matter remains uncertain: will the town be able to rebuild their pool, which was destroyed by the floods? Australians love the water, and in rural towns the local swimming pool is not just a place to exercise, it is also an important social gathering place. Replacing the pool is a top priority for Rochester residents and the Campaspe Shire Council, which has taken the big step of committing \$5 million of council funds towards the \$12.5 million cost of a replacement pool and now seeks support from the Victorian state government. Treasurer, you previously said:

... it is a project as a local member that I am pretty sure I will get behind.

The Treasurer must now stand by these words by providing the state's portion of the funding to reach the goal of \$12.5 million to rebuild the town pool.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1546) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, I have been contacted by parents, teachers and school leaders because of the impact to people at Cornish College. So I ask the minister: will you review the traffic and safety concerns at the Thames Promenade and Mordialloc Freeway intersection in Bangholme impacting students and teachers at Cornish College nearby? The intersection has become a cut through, with many southbound drivers exiting the freeway at Thames Promenade and performing dangerous U-turns across oncoming traffic to re-enter the freeway's on ramp, which is directly in the path of the school and residential traffic, creating significant risk and regular near-miss incidents. Recently there was a traffic accident with a parent at the location. Minister, would you please urgently review this unsafe traffic location before more accidents occur?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1547) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns inadequate bus infrastructure in Mickleham and Kalkallo – growing communities – in particular the 525. It barely dips in and out of Kalkallo before turning around; in fact it just goes up to Toyon Road, up Dwyer Street, and then turns around. Also, many school parents have informed me of the lack of bus infrastructure, including bus shelters, leaving schoolkids exposed to the elements, particularly as we are approaching winter. I am asking the minister to investigate extending the bus route 525 from Craigieburn to Donnybrook, build new bus shelters and also wrap around the recently opened Cloverton Boulevard and then go to Donnybrook station so more people can have access to bus services in Mickleham and Kalkallo.

### Western Victoria Region

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (12:54): (1548) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to the inadequate parking for buses at the Ballarat railway station, which has resulted in buses parking along Lydiard Street North. Constituents report to me that noise and traffic are big concerns, particularly for those with health concerns with their respiratory system.

My constituent has tried to raise the matter with the Department of Transport and Planning, but essentially they have been given the ring around and they cannot talk to anyone in the system, which is of course a great frustration. There was also no consultation with locals about where these buses will park. So my question to the minister is: will the minister review the arrangements and engage with locals, particularly those that live adjacent to where the current buses are parking, so they can get a better outcome?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (1549) My question is for the Minister for Education. In my electorate an eight-year-old girl named Ruby has level 3 autism spectrum disorder, among other significant challenges. She urgently needs a place in a specialist school, but she remains stuck on a waiting list alongside at least 31 other children because her local school is critically understaffed. The principal has said that funding shortfalls have left teachers overwhelmed and unable to meet demand. This is not an isolated case. It reflects a broader failure of our education system, particularly when it comes to vulnerable children. Given the government's decision to delay \$2.4 billion in public school funding until 2031, can the minister confirm how many children are currently on the waiting list for specialist schools in Victoria and what steps are being taken to address staff shortages in those schools?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1550) My matter is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the announcement of activity centres across the state – large ones and smaller ones but with an 800-metre radius around a number of centres. I evidence, for example, Kew or Hawksburn; either of those would fit this category. They have begun a so-called consultation on the Engage Victoria website, the Department of Transport and Planning, and it is clear that it is squirrelled away in a way that is not visible. Equally, when negative comments are made, they are cleansed from the site. I see in the case of Kew, for example, people had made comments which I am aware of, and they were cleansed from the site. So I ask the minister: will she make this more visible, and will she stop the habit of the department cleansing negative comments that they do not like?

### *Petitions*

### Energy policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 5530 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the introduction of legislation by the Government on 11 September 2024 that allows the Government to give itself the power to ban the installation or replacement of household gas appliances, including cooktops. A ban on gas appliances removes choice and makes it harder for many to manage their budgets. The proposed gas appliance ban does not account for the needs of Victoria's proudly diverse communities. Electric alternatives to gas appliances, like heating and hot water systems can be prohibitively expensive and for many households will require tens of thousands of dollars to upgrade their wiring to three phase systems to cope with the additional electrical load. This is a cost that is not reflected in the government's household savings claims. Today, and for the foreseeable future, Victoria's electricity predominantly comes from ageing and increasingly unreliable brown coal generators. Forcing millions of households to switch to electric appliances will result in more emissions, not fewer. Other states and territories recognise the need for choice in energy transitions, and bans on household gas appliances have been rejected by every state Labor government, as well as the Federal Government. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to follow the example set by their state and federal counterparts by respecting and protecting Victorians' right to select the most reliable and affordable energy solutions for their homes, protect our energy security and financial well-being and stop the ban on gas appliances.

**David DAVIS:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Beaconsfield Reservoir

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 659 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the Victorian State Government and Melbourne Water have kept the Beaconsfield Reservoir locked away from public view for decades and they are now planning to drain most of the reservoir, demolish a substantial part of the dam wall and continue to keep it locked up.

**The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government and Melbourne Water to maintain Beaconsfield Reservoir's current water level of 8.85 metres, retain the historic dam wall at its current height, open the surrounding parkland to public access and turn the reserve into a public park with facilities provided to enhance its accessibility and useability.**

**Renee HEATH:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Clyde community hall

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 127 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need for a larger community hall in Clyde and Clyde North. The current facility is unable to accommodate the increasing number of residents and events the community want to host. This space is more than just a building, it serves as a hub for connection, learning, and celebration. As our community expands, the limitations of our existing venue restrict our ability to gather for important events, workshops, and activities.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to fund and support the development of a new community hall in Clyde and Clyde North that reflects the aspirations and needs of the community.**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Barry Beach marine terminal

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 147 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the strong community objection towards Esso Australia's plans to decommission the retired oil and gas rigs at Barry Beach Marine Terminal (BBMT) in Corner Inlet. South Gippsland residents are concerned about the risk posed to their communities and natural environment from the proposed decommissioning activities. Esso Australia plans to transport up to thirteen rig topsides and ten steel pile jackets through the Corner Inlet shipping channel to BBMT to be broken down amidst Ramsar listed wetlands. Community concerns include toxicity (the rig topsides contain complex wastes and improper handling of these materials would pose risks to the inlet, its fisheries and the surrounding communities), erosion (regular movement of large vessels through the Corner Inlet shipping channel could damage geological features), highways (heavy vehicles transporting significant volumes of steel for recycling could further damage the region's narrow roads) and dangerous precedent (allowing this campaign exposes Corner Inlet to the risk of hosting all future decommissioning projects for Bass Strait fossil fuel infrastructure).

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government and the Minister for Planning to commission an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) into Esso Australia's plans for the decommissioning of retired oil and gas rigs at Barry Beach Marine Terminal and ensure that the EES involves a period of public consultation, recognising that any decommissioning activity undertaken in Victoria must reflect international best practice.**

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 685 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the ongoing congestion and traffic delays for the Hume Highway, M31, exit ramp to Donnybrook, as well as traffic from Mickleham and Mickleham Business Park. The Donnybrook Road bridge over Hume Highway needs to be upgraded by adding two additional lanes, one on each side, to increase safety, reduce congestion and improve travel time for the Kalkallo and Donnybrook communities.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to upgrade the Donnybrook Road bridge over the Hume Freeway by making it a dual lane road in order to meet the public demand of the rapidly growing Kalkallo and Donnybrook communities.**

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Papers****Independent Review of the Modernisation of the WorkCover Scheme***Final Report*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:02): I move, by leave:

That the final report on the independent review of the modernisation of the WorkCover scheme be tabled.

**Motion agreed to.**

**University of Divinity***Report 2024*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:02): On behalf of my colleague Ms Tierney, I move, by leave:

That the University of Divinity report 2024 be tabled.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Committees****Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 6*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:02): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 6 of 2025, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Select Committee on Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274***Inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274*

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (13:03): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table the select committee's report on the inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274, including appendices, extracts of proceedings, minority reports and transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**David ETTERSHANK:** I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

Housing is one of the truly great policy challenges of our time. It is abundantly clear that Victoria needs many more homes, especially more genuinely affordable homes, in well-located areas near public transport, jobs and services. None of the committee members or indeed any of the witnesses who gave evidence to the inquiry dispute this cruel and pressing reality. This is what the government has sought to address with its Victoria planning provisions amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274. The amendments change statewide planning provisions to enable denser housing and activity centres, including in middle-ring suburbs, while also making the most significant statewide changes to ResCode since 2001. The amendments are made on the promise of certainty and speed, largely at the expense of the rights of the community and their local councils to involvement in the decision-making process. Pragmatically, we must recognise and accept that planning reforms of this magnitude that involve such significant trade-offs will be contested.

I commend the government for seeking for seeking to address Victoria's housing challenges. However, the committee found widespread support for the government's objectives of increasing housing supply and affordability in well-located areas and a strong appetite from Victorians to be involved in discussions about the future of their state, their city and their neighbourhoods. A number of witnesses and submissions supported the government's approach; however, a major problem facing the committee was the absence of requested modelling from the government to demonstrate that the amendments will achieve their objectives. In the absence of such modelling, the committee was encouraged to accept doctrinaire economics – that simply increasing supply will increase the availability of more affordable housing. Unfortunately, this act of act of economic faith was challenged both by experts in the development sector and by documents provided to the committee by the Department of Transport and Planning. So in this context, and without that modelling, the committee was reluctant to downplay the many unintended consequences arising from the new planning provisions that were identified in evidence. Of the many unintended consequences identified by stakeholders, the most concerning for me related to the new townhouse and low-rise code, the removal of consideration of flood and fire risks from the planning process, the reduction of environmentally sustainable development standards in major local government areas and the excessive removal of existing trees. Surely we can address Victoria's housing challenges without also creating these new risks. Many community groups and councils felt strongly that they were not adequately consulted and that their concerns were not taken into consideration. I do worry that the government is overlooking the benefits of consultative and collaborative engagement with councils and communities. More work is necessary if Victoria's housing distribution policies and the mechanisms that will bring these policies about are to achieve widespread public support.

Given the dramatic scope of these planning amendments, the committee felt that a process of monitoring these changes and seeking to improve their efficacy over time is needed. This is consistent with previous recommendations from the Victorian Auditor-General in 2008 and 2017 – recommendations which the government has not acted on. I hope the government will embrace the findings and recommendations in this report and make changes to the new planning provisions so that Victorians can have confidence that the government's planning reforms have been chosen for the right reasons. As one witness put to us, this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get it right; we must ensure that we do.

I wish to thank all of those who contributed to this inquiry, either through submissions or at public hearings. The short time available to the committee meant that we were not able to explore every issue to the extent we would have liked; however, this important evidence has been published online, and I hope it will inform future policymakers. I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their diligence, hard work and generally good humour throughout the inquiry. Finally, I wish to thank the

secretariat staff, many of whom were directed from other projects to assist the committee in completing its work in such a short amount of time. To Keir Delaney, Matt Newington, Kieran Crowe, Whitney Kapa, Julie Barnes, Sylvette Bassy and Elektra Banikos, on behalf of the committee we thank you for your outstanding work on this inquiry. I commend the report to the chamber.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:08): Well, this select committee into these planning provisions was given an extraordinarily significant task: to examine some pretty significant changes to Victoria's planning scheme to address what is a fundamental crisis that Victoria faces, which is that we need to build more homes to house more Victorians. Unfortunately members of the community – interested groups – were provided with an exceptionally truncated period of time due to the six weeks – the only six weeks – that the committee had to deal with these matters. A matter of a handful of business days were provided to the public to present submissions. For some members of the committee the result was a foregone conclusion, and there are matters that I am sure we will deal with later in the week dealing with those; that being said, I thank all members of the committee, and particularly want to thank the chair for the manner in which he conducted this inquiry. There were strong views on many sides. There was a lot of very complex information presented to us in very short periods of time, and the committee has attempted to distil that in both the substantive report and also the minority reports attached. I think it is pretty clear, however, that the status quo that existed prior to these planning amendments is not delivering the housing that Victorians need. These changes are a step in the right direction, are designed to build more homes for more Victorians and will ensure that more Victorians can live in the communities they want to, and any attempt to revoke the planning amendments the subject of this inquiry will be a major step backwards for Victoria.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:10): I want to begin by thanking the committee staff for the amazing work that they have done. I am not going to list them all – I have only got 2 minutes – but I do want to thank them for the work that has been done, and the chair and my fellow committee members.

This is a very significant inquiry, and whilst it was a short period of time, it is tremendously significant, what is being examined. There is an agreed need for additional housing, but the problem is these three planning amendments and some of the associated amendments will not deliver that – and the evidence is overwhelming that they will not deliver that. In fact what they will deliver is the destruction of Victoria in terms of our built heritage, particularly in Melbourne and particularly in those suburbs where there is significant heritage and vegetation that is very much a part of the ambience and livability of those suburbs.

The Liberal members of that committee were very much in favour of ensuring that communities and councils have their say. It is, after all, a fundamental principle of democracy that there should be a say for people whose community and future are impacted by these changes. The arrogant way the government proceeded with these planning amendments, the lack of consultation and the ignorance with which they proceeded are a great concern. Even the Activity Centres Standing Advisory Committee was ignored; its specific recommendations were ignored.

We need changes to our planning system, but these need to be particularised for each area. You cannot have one size fits all across the whole of Melbourne, because you will see the destruction of large parts of our Melbourne suburbs, our beautiful suburbs on which the ambience and history of our city is built. The built form that we rely on so much was at risk, and it is clear that it is still at risk with these amendments.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (13:12): At the outset I too want to thank my fellow committee members – the chair in particular – and the secretariat for the incredible work they did pulling this together in such a short period of time. I think this inquiry was a great demonstration of the Parliament doing what it should, and that is applying public scrutiny to government decisions. This is particularly important in planning, where we still have no effective oversight mechanisms despite repeated recommendations from the Victorian Auditor-General to establish them.

While noting almost universal support for increased housing supply, increased density and increased affordable housing, serious doubts have been raised through this inquiry as to how these planning changes will achieve these goals. The evidence received demonstrated the changes were pushed through, with the government selectively consulting and leaving out, in many instances, critical partners like local governments, planning experts and communities.

There are deep concerns about the outcomes of these reforms, including the effective lowering of energy efficiency standards for new developments in the most populous local government areas covered by the 27 Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment councils, loss of tree canopy and vegetation, and the overriding of key local considerations around flood and fire risk. In a changing climate we need drastically more resilient buildings and urban spaces, not less. We have already got enough housing that needs expensive retrofitting; why on earth wouldn't we take the opportunity to get it right for new builds.

The changes are also a huge missed opportunity to deliver more affordable housing. Why hasn't the government looked to introduce a mandatory affordable housing and social housing requirement in these changes, something countless housing advocates, unions and support services have long been calling for? We cannot afford to continue to leave it to the market to solve the housing crisis. The government talk a big game about how these changes will create more housing for young people and those who need it most, yet they have been unable to produce evidence or modelling to support these claims. If they are serious about ensuring we have sustainable affordable housing, then I urge them to take on board the findings and recommendations of this inquiry.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:14): I also rise to share a few remarks on the tabling of this report today and in doing so also thank both Matt Newington and Kieran Crowe and their team, our committee secretariat, the committee members and indeed, for his work, our chair, who pulled together a report in an unreasonably limited amount of time but did so nevertheless very well. This is a significant opportunity; the amendments which have been the focus of this inquiry are a significant part of actually changing the housing system, the planning system, in this state. For decades planning strategies have talked about the need for activity centres to slow urban sprawl, and for decades we have seen those trends continue unabated. The Allan Labor government is taking genuine action, and that is what these amendments represent. They represent providing those meaningful housing options for all Victorians and for young generations who are being, frankly, screwed over in every state of this nation by the existing systems that are in place.

We have before us on the notice paper an outrageous revocation motion by the Liberal Party, who wish to take us back and who wish to deny an entire generation of Victorians the fair chance to get a home of their own in a place where they want to live. We will have much more time, I am sure, to discuss this tomorrow, but I do note it is disappointing to see again the foregone conclusion in Mr Davis and his colleagues' minority report – along with, I note, their managing, impressively, to misspell the names of both the Premier and the Minister for Planning in one sentence. We see again the foregone conclusion of revoking these amendments, which we know that he wanted to do, because he read in the motion the day before this select committee was established. It is an outrage, and it is equally clear that to revoke these planning amendments would be an act of unprecedented vandalism of the housing aspirations of a whole generation of Victorians.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:16): I rise to speak to the report that has been tabled this morning, and I too want to acknowledge the work of the secretariat, who were put under quite a bit of pressure, I might say, in terms of this inquiry, which was of great interest. It actually did enlighten, I think, many community members who came before the inquiry and also many who were watching on. There were a lot of witnesses that we heard from, and I do want to acknowledge the work of the committee and the chair as well in putting to those witnesses a number of questions that were really relevant.

As everyone has said, we acknowledge that there needs to be more housing. It is not an issue around whether housing is needed or not, but what the government is doing is very significant. They are applying this cookie-cutter approach right across our suburbs, which many witnesses said is going to have a very significant impact, whether that is to the built heritage or to the tree canopy or to the amenity; those issues cannot be disregarded. I was very pleased that the Municipal Association of Victoria and a number of local councils provided excellent evidence, and I only wish that the government would look at what the MAV and those local councils had to say in this inquiry, because their concerns should not go unheard. The community groups' concerns should not go unheard, and the many experts that came before the inquiry that were questioning the government's approach should not go unheard. This report goes to a lot of those issues, and I would hope that the government would look upon it favourably and take on those recommendations. Again, I want to pass on my thanks to all those that came before the inquiry and all those that were involved, and I hope that the government takes this issue very seriously.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (13:18): I too rise to thank the secretariat, who did an outstanding job in a very limited amount of time to produce this report, and to also thank our fellow committee members and the chair, who also did an exceptional job. I want to make one point: we constantly hear about the fundamental crisis – Mr Batchelor – in housing. This crisis is of the government's own making. If you put 15 taxes on developers and if over 40 per cent of the cost of a house is taxation, then you will have a crisis in housing. And on top of that, if you have all the CFMEU workers absorbing many of the builders that we need to build houses, at extortionate rates of pay, we will not be able to build affordable houses – there is no question about that.

Lots of blame was levelled at local government. Now, I want to tell you that in many local government areas they have approved hundreds and hundreds of developments. In one council alone there would be over a thousand dwellings ready to go, but no developer in this state is going to put a spade in the ground, because the product to market will be unaffordable for anybody – not just the next generation that want a house, but anybody. This government is totally responsible for the housing crisis that exists in this state today – nobody else. To apply this extraordinary level of amendments to the planning scheme so they can say they are going to do something about affordable – let alone social – housing is a lie.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:20): First and foremost, can I express my thanks to the secretariat, the chair, my fellow committee members and of course the stakeholders, community organisations and individual community members, because what was put in front of us as committee members was an extraordinarily short timeframe to consider something as significant as the challenge of building more homes for more Victorians. Within just six weeks we heard from many community leaders and of course organisations about the housing challenge and about how for some they just are not playing fair. They block housing every chance they get, they are blocking homes for those that need it and they fight for the status quo. That is right; that is what we heard – the deep, deep fight for the status quo. What we heard was that some representatives from some communities absolutely wanted everything to stay the same. I for one do not live in a deep fantasy land. I know that for working people housing is the second-most pressing concern after cost of living. The link between affordable housing and stable employment could not be more clear. Workers deserve to live in areas with access to public transport, essential services and an engaged community.

Trades Hall came, and they told us clearly that all levels of government should act decisively and inclusively to ensure that more Victorians can access secure, dignified housing in the areas that they want to live. The challenge could not be more clear: 11 million people will live in Victoria in 2056. That is because people move here. They want to live their lives here. They want to raise their families here. They want to work here. This is an enormous challenge, and we must step up and meet it. There will be a growth of about 4.5 million extra people from 2022. I can say that we must build more homes where Victorians want to live and grow Victoria as a place for future generations to thrive.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Electoral Matters Committee***Ballot Paper Shortages at the 2022 Victorian State Election*

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:23): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2023, I table a special report on ballot paper shortages at the 2022 Victorian state election and implementation of recommendation 60 of volume 2 of the inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Lee TARLAMIS:** I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

During the 2022 state election multiple voting centres ran out of ballot papers on election day and at least one voting centre closed early. Although the Victorian Electoral Commission provided information on these matters to the committee on request, the VEC chose not to discuss them in its report to Parliament on the 2022 election other than noting some voter complaints about ballot paper shortages. The committee published the results of its investigation into these matters as part of its report on the 2022 state election. However, the committee was not satisfied that the issues had been fully explored and reported on. The committee therefore recommended that the VEC produce a supplementary report dealing with what occurred and how the VEC intends to respond.

The VEC's supplementary report was provided to the committee in February 2025. Following this, the committee prepared a special report on the implementation of this recommendation and the additional information that was in the VEC's report. The committee considers that these events represent serious errors by the VEC in relation to the running of the election, communicating with the public and being transparent with the Parliament. As a result, our supplementary report made two findings and a recommendation as follows:

**FINDING 1:** The full extent and impact of ballot paper shortages at the 2022 Victorian state election is still unclear. There remain questions about which voting centres ran out of ballot papers, how long voters were unable to vote at these centres, the timing of additional ballot paper deliveries, whether voters were told to attend other voting centres and how many voters were affected in total. The 166 people who filled out 'voter information reports' may not be the full number of people who were unable to vote on election day due to ballot paper shortages.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the Victorian Electoral Commission investigate low-tech processes that will enable it to record information about every voting centre that runs out of ballot papers at future elections, including when each voting centre ran out of ballot papers, when new ballot papers were provided and how many people were impacted.

...

**FINDING 2:** Implementing electronic roll mark-off at all voting centres would reduce the likelihood of voting centres running out of ballot papers, would make multiple voting more difficult and may assist with managing queuing times. The VEC intends to implement this gradually across future elections. The Committee would like to see this rolled out as quickly as possible and in as many voting centres as possible at the 2026 Victorian state election.

Clearly there is more work to be done, and I would note that the VEC has committed to multiple actions to address these risks in future elections.

I would like to also thank members of the committee for their work on this report: from this chamber, Jacinta Ermacora, Evan Mulholland, Dr Sarah Mansfield and David Ettershank; and in the other place, the chair Dylan Wight, deputy chair Chris Crewther, Emma Kealy and Nathan Lambert. I would also like to thank the committee secretariat, executive officer Dr Christopher Gribbin, research officer Dr Chiara De Lazzari and administrative officer Sarah Catherall, without whom we would not be able to do the important work that we do.

**Motion agreed to.***Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order of 12 May 2025 giving approval to the granting of a licence at The Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve.

Deakin University – Report, 2024.

Federation University Australia – Report, 2024.

Financial Management Act 1994 – Minister for Environment’s report that the Alpine Resorts Victoria Report, 2024 has not been received, together with an explanation for the delay, under section 46(3)(a) of the Act.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to the Residential Tenancies and Residential Tenancies (Rooming Standards) Amendment (Minimum Energy Efficiency and Safety Standards) Regulations 2024 (*Gazette S213, 30 April 2025*).

La Trobe University – Report, 2024.

Local Government Act 2020 – Order in Council for the suspension of an individual councillor of Whittlesea City Council, under section 229A(5) of the Act.

Monash University – Report, 2024.

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

Bayside Planning Scheme – Amendment C207.

Bayside, Boroondara, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Maroondah, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington and Whittlesea Planning Schemes – Amendment GC252.

Benalla Planning Scheme – Amendment C46.

Brimbank Planning Scheme – Amendment C243.

Casey, Greater Dandenong, Hobsons Bay, Melbourne, Whittlesea and Yarra Planning Schemes – Amendment GC237.

Darebin Planning Scheme – Amendment C227.

Frankston Planning Scheme – Amendment C160.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme – Amendment C273.

Hume Planning Scheme – Amendment C279.

Kingston Planning Scheme – Amendment C226.

Knox Planning Scheme – Amendment C202.

Mansfield Planning Scheme – Amendment C55.

Maroondah Planning Scheme – Amendment C160.

Merri-bek Planning Scheme – Amendment C234.

Moorabool Planning Scheme – Amendment C118.

South Gippsland Planning Scheme – Amendment C132.

Towong Planning Scheme – Amendment C40.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendments VC251, VC280 and VC281.

Warrnambool Planning Scheme – Amendment C213.

Wyndham Planning Scheme – Amendment C272.

Professional Standards Act 2003 –

The Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand Professional Standards Scheme (*Gazette S207, 29 April 2025*).

The New South Wales Bar Association Professional Standards Scheme (*Gazette S207, 29 April 2025*).

The Victorian Bar Professional Standards Scheme (*Gazette S207, 29 April 2025*).

The Western Australian Bar Association Professional Standards Scheme (*Gazette S207, 29 April 2025*).

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University) – Report, 2024.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Audit Act 1994 – No. 23.

Bail Act 1977 – No. 16.

Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988 – No. 25.

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024 – No. 17.

Road Safety Act 1986 – Nos. 15 and 21.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Nos. 19, 20 and 24.

Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 – No. 22.

Wrongs Act 1958 – No. 18.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to –

Orders under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 relating to the –

Engineered stone compliance code.

Metal casting compliance code.

Statutory Rule Nos. 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 25.

Legislative instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of –

Declaration of Gaseous Fuels under the Gas Industry Act 2001.

PrimeSafe Meat Industry Licensing and Fees Determination 2025 under the Meat Industry Act 1993.

PrimeSafe Seafood Safety Licensing and Fees Determination 2025 under the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Meat Industry Act 1993.

Swinburne University of Technology – Report, 2024.

The University of Melbourne – Report, 2024.

Victoria University – Report, 2024.

Proclamations of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates for the following acts:

Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2024 – Whole Act – 17 April 2025 (*Gazette S182, 15 April 2025*).

Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2024 – Division 5 of Part 2 – 3 April 2025 (*Gazette S149, 1 April 2025*).

Youth Justice Act 2024 – Parts 22.2 and 22.3 and Division 1 of Part 22.1 – 22 April 2025 (*Gazette S149, 1 April 2025*).

### *Committees*

#### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

*Inquiry into the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023*

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to section 36(2)(c) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a copy of the government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023.

## Legal and Social Issues Committee

### *Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria*

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to section 36(2)(c) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a copy of the government response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee’s inquiry into the state education system in Victoria.

### *Petitions*

### Responses

**The Clerk:** I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the Minister for Environment’s response to a petition titled ‘Save Silverleaves from coastal erosion’, the Minister for Planning’s response to a petition titled ‘Desist from high-rise, high-density zone planning’ and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure’s response to a petition titled ‘Moonee Ponds and Essendon level crossing removals’.

### *Production of documents*

### Energy policy

**The Clerk:** I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 16 April 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 2 April 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to energy documents. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond to the order and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response as soon as possible.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**The Clerk:** I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 16 April 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 19 March 2025 on the motion of Mr Mulholland relating to the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond to the order and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response as soon as possible.

### Water policy

**The Clerk:** I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 16 April 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 19 March 2025 on the motion of Dr Mansfield relating to the water grid plan. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond to the order and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, these three documents motions have had a lengthy period of time –

**The PRESIDENT:** You cannot debate it. Mr Davis, the only facility you have got is if you would like to move a motion to take note of each individual document on the next day of meeting. I can invite you to do that.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:30): I move:

That the three letters just read be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union

**The Clerk:** Finally, I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 12 May 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 28 August 2024 on the motion of Mr Mulholland and further to the government’s initial response on 10 September 2024 relating to government procurement contracts

and projects briefs with the CFMEU or CFMMEU. The letter states that a thorough and diligent search was conducted and no in-scope documents have been identified.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:31): I move:

That this letter be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

#### **General business**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:47): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 14 May 2025:

- (1) order of the day 1, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by Katherine Copsey referring matters relating to electric vehicles to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee; and
- (3) notice of motion 905, standing in David Davis's name, to revoke Victoria Planning Provisions planning scheme amendments VC257 and VC267.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Motions*

#### **Middle East conflict**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:47): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) last week on 7 May 2025 United Nations experts issued a statement saying that escalating atrocities in Gaza present an urgent moral crossroads and states must act now to end the violence or bear witness to the annihilation of the Palestinian population in Gaza, an outcome with irreversible consequences for our shared humanity;
  - (b) the statement continues that no-one is spared, not children, persons with disabilities, nursing mothers, journalists, health professionals, aid workers or hostages;
  - (c) since the breaking of the ceasefire, the UN experts say that while states debate terminology on whether it is or is not genocide, the State of Israel continues its relentless destruction of life in Gaza through attacks by land, air and sea, displacing and massacring the surviving population with impunity;
  - (d) the statement is clear in its call for action for countries such as Australia that are member states of the UN, stating, 'The world is watching. Will member states live up to their obligations and intervene to stop the slaughter, hunger and disease and other war crimes and crimes against humanity that are perpetrated daily in complete impunity?'; and
  - (e) UN experts have called on states to transcend rhetoric and take enforceable action to immediately end the carnage and ensure accountability for perpetrators and have demanded 'immediate international intervention'.
- (2) does not support the State of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza; and
- (3) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

**Leave refused.**

*Members statements***Federal election**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:49): It is a great time for my community in Southern Metro, and that is thanks to the re-election of the Albanese government. It is a great day for my community of Ashwood, Malvern and Hawthorn, with the re-election of Carina Garland in Chisholm. It is a great day for my community in the electorate of Prahran, where so many of my constituents for the first time in 15 years have a member who can deliver for them. It was great to properly meet Sarah Witty, our passionate new local member of Parliament for the seat of Melbourne, at her campaign launch, and I wish her well.

I also want to pay tribute to a community where I spent most of my time in the election campaign, the community of Macnamara. From Caulfield to Albert Park, St Kilda to Elwood, no-one reflects Macnamara more than Josh Burns. I have known Josh for many years. He is hardworking and he cares, and I am stoked that he was re-elected, and with a massive swing and mandate. Congratulations, mate, on your appointment as special envoy for social housing and homelessness.

Despite the behaviour of others at pre-poll, setting up booths and on election day, the Albanese Labor government was not deterred. There will be no nuclear in our backyard. Others can block, others can be the nasty party, but we will get on and deliver.

**Federal election**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:51): I want to make some reflections too on the federal election, and I want to give great credit to a number of our candidates. Amelia Hamer in Kooyong ran an amazing campaign, with the most posters out in any seat in the country in recorded history. But I should also note the work done by Benson in Macnamara, and Katie Allen – and I note the tragic announcement that she has made recently – has been a remarkable person in Parliament and in her campaign recently in Chisholm. I do want to particularly single out Tim Wilson, though, and his victory in what is a very important symbol to make sure that we can see a way forward to deal with some of these teal members, and I am very pleased that he has –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** They are certainly Labor-lite. They are like that – that is right. They are a certain sort of mix of Labor and other things. But let us be clear: Tim did an amazing job, and Goldstein is a seat that he has won back. He certainly lost it, and he has won it back again. He set out a three-year program. I pay tribute to Tim, who is a personal friend of many of ours and has also run a remarkable campaign.

**Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (13:52): May is Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month. Counting Dead Women Australia and Destroy the Joint are reporting that at least 15 women are known to have been killed by violence so far this year. We hear government saying this has to stop and making various promises, and yet the violence continues, the deaths continue and there is a strange tacit acceptance that says volumes about how these deaths are really viewed, because if we actually cared, this would be a national emergency. Over one-fifth of children experience childhood abuse or witness parental violence before the age of 15. Growing up in a violent household is one of the strongest predictors of becoming a perpetrator of violence as an adult. Unless we do more to focus on breaking cycles of violence, women will continue to be murdered in their homes. There is so much we can do to better support these families. Ensuring enough safe and secure housing for all has to be at the top of the list, and we need income support that actually enables people to live rather than be in constant financial stress, cracking down on access to gambling and alcohol and early identification and intensive support for families showing signs of stress and dysfunction. We actually have all the answers, but first our governments must stop accepting that these deaths are inevitable.

**Nelson men's and women's shed**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (13:54): On Friday I visited the town of Nelson. Nelson is located on the mouth of the Glenelg River, right on the South Australian border and 422 kilometres west of Melbourne. It is a renowned fishing spot and a beautiful, tranquil place to hike, kayak, birdwatch and also of course bike-ride. With a permanent population of 189 people, I was impressed to note that, with 32 men's shed members and 30 women's shed members, that constitutes about a third of the population of Nelson. So the proportion of volunteers in Nelson is amongst the highest in the state. The shed members are also members of other community organisations in Nelson, and I want to thank them for their advocacy and for the work they do for the Nelson community and for the warm welcome that they gave me. The Victorian government have provided \$70,000 for them to build the first men's shed and women's shed in Nelson. I congratulate them for the work they have done to this point. They have got their site cleared and most of their approvals are in place. The men's and women's sheds will clearly become an important community hub for the people of Nelson.

**Anzac Day**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:55): Since the house last met, a number of events have been held. I want to first acknowledge Anzac Day, when I attended a number of services in my electorate where hundreds of my constituents came out and paid their respects to those men and women who have served this great nation over many, many years, and it was wonderful to see so many young people.

**Breast Cancer Network Australia**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:56): Last week I attended a wonderful celebration of the 20-year partnership between the Breast Cancer Network Australia and Sussan. Lyn Swinburne and Naomi Milgrom should be congratulated for the partnership that they have forged over that time, really providing support to those with breast cancer and their families and providing that advocacy, and the work that they are doing should be absolutely commended. I hope that there are many more years to come with that very significant partnership.

**Federal election**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:56): Finally, I too would like to acknowledge the Liberal candidates that stood in the federal election. Whilst not all were successful, they conducted themselves with great dignity and they very much represented our great party. I want to congratulate those who were successful, including Tim Wilson, who has already been mentioned, but also put on record my gratitude for all of the work of candidates Benson Saulo, Amelia Hamer and Katie Allen in particular, who is undergoing a very significant illness at this point in time, and we all wish her well.

**Euroa Clay Target Club**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:57): On Sunday I spent my Mother's Day celebrating with the Euroa Clay Target Club for their 70th anniversary. The 53 competitors that attended on the day travelled from all parts of Australia to compete in the shooting competition. I would like to congratulate Tony Rohrlach and Paul McKendrick on receiving life memberships, and I very much look forward to continuing my support for responsible gun ownership and shooting sports in the future.

**Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:57): Around 300 members of the CFA and farming communities from all over regional Victoria have gathered today on the steps of Parliament to protest the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. This levy will hit our rural Victorians with a brutal hike in an already significant tax to our landowners. Yet again it is regional Victorians being targeted by a financially irresponsible, city-centric Labor government, and this needs to stop.

### Chinese Australian community

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:58): Recently I joined Chinese Australian community leaders from across Box Hill, Glen Waverley, Doncaster and the area in a community forum, where we discussed helping Chinese Australians integrate to Australian life and some of the obstacles that they face. It was a really effective community forum organised by Minwen from the English Corners group in Box Hill, who operate out of Box Hill Central, and it was therefore fitting that the climax of that event was going down to Box Hill Central and unveiling a new sign paid for by Whitehorse City Council, a banner that celebrates the English Corners program – the English Corners operation community group that helps Chinese Australians adapt to Australian life by improving their English skills. They are committed to helping Chinese people integrate to Australian life and overcome language barriers. It was a pleasure to meet so many of the Chinese community leaders, and I commend Minwen Wu and the Chinese Australian Network for their leadership and promoting inclusion and participation through language and community engagement.

### Federal election

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:59): I would also like to pass on my congratulations to Liberal members and Liberal candidates in the election, including Chris Parr and the departing Keith Wolahan and Michael Sukkar, who all gave gracious and wise concession speeches, and the community will miss them deeply.

### Air pollution

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:59): This Labor government's obsession with building more and more costly roads is set to create a new crisis in air quality and subsequent health impacts. Communities across west and north-east Melbourne are protesting that the air stacks from tunnels on the West Gate Tunnel and North East Link will pump fine particulate pollution onto local communities, the kind of fine particles that can get deep into people's lungs and cause a range of serious health issues, including asthma, heart disease and other lung diseases. The communities are calling for filtration systems to be installed on each air stack as well as air quality monitoring to be done prior to the opening of each megaproject. The West Gate Tunnel is supposed to get trucks off residential streets, but without filtration, communities will still be exposed to pollution from over 16,000 trucks each and every day. Filtration is proven technology, it is readily available and it should be fitted from day one, just as the government's own inquiry recommended in 2017. The Victorian environment protection agency has stated to local communities that despite the relevant environmental reference standards having legal status and that the air quality limits apply to the North East Link road project, the EPA has no statutory powers to enforce compliance or capacity to intervene, so the government must take responsibility for the pollution that will flow from their enormous road projects and intervene to protect the health of the community.

### Bega Cheese plant closure

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:01): The announcement that Bega Cheese will close its Strathmerton site and consolidate operations in New South Wales, causing the loss of 300 local jobs, has shocked workers, their families and the broader community and sent a clear warning about the dire business conditions created by the Allan Labor government. My first thoughts are with the workers, families, suppliers and contractors affected by the devastating decision. The immediate priority must be to ensure Bega redeploys as many staff as possible to their Tatura site and works with other local manufacturers to place affected workers into new jobs. The state government must also step up and provide support and retraining assistance for workers needing to transition to other industries. Suppliers of milk and other goods and services to the Strathmerton plant will also face heavy impacts, with economic ripples felt right across our entire region. Recent analysis of ABS data shows that 129,000 Victorian businesses closed in 2024 – that is over 350 a day – and in recent years more than 3000 businesses have moved interstate. This mass exodus reflects the rising cost of doing business in Victoria, fuelled by the Allan Labor government's increased taxes and suffocating red tape.

It is sadly unsurprising that a company would choose to relocate to New South Wales, where business conditions are more competitive and government policy encourages rather than punishes investments and job creation. The Labor government cannot manage money and cannot manage the economy, and Victorians are paying the price.

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

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:02): I want to place on record my sincere thanks to the hundreds – probably bordering on thousands, if we add all the rallies and meetings together – of farmers, councillors, CFA volunteers and professional firefighters, including United Firefighters Union of Australia branch secretary Peter Marshall, who travelled from all over Victoria today and on Friday in utes, fire trucks and cars to stand in unison to oppose this 60th most egregious tax this callous Labor government are imposing on all Victorians, but particularly farmers. They left their drought-ridden farms, where animals are starving and crops not growing, to give this place a message. But what was absolutely appalling was not one of you from that side of the chamber was present, either on Friday or today, nor have you come out to meetings that have been held that I have attended in Beaufort, Ascot, Barunah Plains. Not anybody from the crossbench over there – the Greens, the Legalise Cannabis Party – attended these rallies. These people are in desperate straits, and you all stayed silent and absent, not one of you prepared to face up to the farmers, the volunteers and the professional firefighters in calling on you to abandon this egregious tax.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:04): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 916, and order of the day, government business, 1, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

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

#### **Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025**

#### *Cognate debate*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:04): I move, by leave:

That this house authorises the President to permit the second-reading debates on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 to be taken concurrently.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motions of Enver Erdogan and Ingrid Stitt:**

That these bills be now read a second time.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:05): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to both these bills, the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025, and in doing so indicate that the opposition will make a number of points about each bill. Both bills are in fact omnibus bills of a type. They cobble together a number of changes across a broader front, and in that sense it is quite appropriate that they be considered cognately, noting that the votes on the second

reading and the committee stages and a third-reading vote would of course occur distinctly and separately for each of them. Notwithstanding that, I want to put on record a number of points.

I am going to start with the Victorian energy efficiency target (VEET) bill and indicate what it does. It extends the energy upgrades program's legislated end date from 2030 to 2045, it explicitly allows activities that may be mandated by another law or regulation to be prescribed under the Victorian energy upgrades program, it allows the VEU targets for upcoming years to be set in a two-year rather than a five-year block, it expands the Essential Services Commission's compliance and enforcement powers and it removes technical restrictions on the creation and surrender of the Victorian energy efficiency certificates.

I want to start by saying that, first of all, the Liberals and Nationals support the concept of energy efficiency. We see that that is an important position where outcomes can be achieved in terms of reduction of emissions but also efficiency in terms of better financial outcomes. So it is in that sense a happy medium spot. It is a spot where the impact on businesses and households is likely to be less than some other interventions that are designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That is an important understanding and background point, but that is not in itself a licence for any program, any approach towards energy efficiency. It is a program that still needs to run, dare I say, efficiently, it is a program that needs to run safely and it is a program that needs to run in a way that does not cause unintended consequences.

Now the truth of the matter: this has been a dog of a program. It is a program that has been poorly run by this state government. We were all aware of – and who can forget them – the images of small businesses with two, four and up to six fridges lined up outside the businesses where the energy efficiency program has delivered free fridges to businesses. Of course moving to an energy-efficient fridge makes perfect sense in terms of exactly the issues of energy efficiency I have pointed to. But delivering the second or the third or the fourth or the fifth or the sixth fridge is a point of declining efficiency for the businesses.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, I have got to say, Mr McIntosh over there seems to support the idea of delivering six fridges to a business under the efficiency program. What about the cost blowouts on that? We know that the program is the least efficient energy efficiency program in the country.

There are of course in Labor's history of energy efficiency programs some real doozies. The Kevin Rudd pink batts – who can forget the pink batts – led to the lives of people being lost, enormous inefficiency and enormous cost overruns. Nobody can deny that that program was a complete and utter dog of a program. Equally, this one that is being run in Victoria at the moment is a program that has not been well run. It is a program that has had –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, what do you think? Was it a great thing to deliver six fridges to a business – unrequested fridges? I mean, honestly.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** It is certainly an amazing image, you would have to say. You would certainly say it is an amazing image, wouldn't you? A business with six fridges lined up out the front, all delivered for free – and the business only needed one fridge. I mean, no, this is seriously important.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, how many businesses need five unrequested fridges?

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, President, the member should be able to conduct their statement and debate in silence.

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order. Mr Berger and Mr McIntosh, can you desist with your loud interjecting.

**David DAVIS:** The various schemes around the country run at various levels of efficiency, and I wrote a note on this bill shortly after it came in. I could look up today's figures; they will not be that different. In March 2021 the Australian scheme was \$33, the certificate price. The other schemes around the country were of a similar order – some down much cheaper. But the Victorian scheme had careered up to a massive amount per certificate, and this has been a very, very inefficient scheme. It is a scheme that has been poorly run from the start. It is a scheme that the government has imposed on the communities. It is a scheme that has actually got the highest amount of impact on Victorian bills – household bills and small business bills. So you might want to laugh about what people have to pay. You might want to laugh at the fact that families and businesses have got higher electricity charges because of this scheme. I say even where a scheme has good intentions, it can be poorly designed and poorly delivered – and this is such a scheme.

It is important to note that the state government have even recognised that there are a series of real problems with this scheme, and they have actually ordered a strategic review. The discussion paper for the strategic review is out. We would argue that the strategic review should be done before the bill is brought to Parliament and before we change the legislation. We will make that point in our amendments. We will also say that the strategic review should be tabled in Parliament. The state government has not been open about the submissions that have gone to that review, and the state government, further than that, has got the department to do the review itself. So you have got the department, which has failed in delivering properly and efficiently in this way, and it has been asked to do the strategic review of its own work. You have got the kid at home being asked to review their homework. The kid – in this case, the department – is actually reviewing its own homework.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, I am arguing that the department should not be reviewing its own homework. I am actually arguing that the department should have been independently reviewed. Instead of reviewing its own homework, the department should have had an independent external review looking at the failures, looking at the problems and looking at what could be done to fix the problems and what could be done to improve the operation of the scheme. What is so controversial about that suggestion? It seems to have agitated a number on the other side of the chamber, but I think it is a very reasonable point to make. If you are going to do a strategic review, do the strategic review independently; do not give it to the department. The department is going to say, 'No, we've all done very well. It's fantastic, how we're operating our own scheme.' The review that they are undertaking there I predict will give a real tick to the department; I think they are going to be seen as doing a very good job. But let me be clear: they have not done a very good job; they have botched many parts of this program. I am not saying I am against energy efficiency – on the contrary, I actually say energy efficiency is an important part of our approach – but it behoves those who want energy efficiency programs in place to run them properly, to run them efficiently.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, run them properly: properly review the program, independently review the program, release the independent review –

*Members interjecting.*

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, President, it seems that there has been some red cordial consumed at lunchtime and people are a little bit too exercised. I ask that the member can actually speak in silence.

**The PRESIDENT:** Other than the red cordial stuff, I uphold the point of order. I think there has been some flouting of my previous ruling. I will call the members to order. Mr Davis to continue without being yelled at.

**David DAVIS:** These are very reasonable points. It might be appropriate at this point to distribute the amendments that we are proposing.

**Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**David DAVIS:** As I said, it has been a poor program. The spot prices for the certificates have surged from around \$30 up to well over \$100. The direct costs are incorporated on energy bills – that is the highest impact in Australia on energy bills. If you ran the program efficiently and properly, without waste, without misapplication, you could actually abate more carbon dioxide emissions. That is the point: you could actually do more in that respect, or you could do the same amount more cheaply. These are, again, very reasonable points.

We do not for a moment think that the setting of the targets is a sensible change here. The minister is seeking the power to set single-year targets, enabling her to play games ahead of the state election, to strike targets that are less embarrassing for the government, given greenhouse emissions have actually been rising the last two years. Let us be clear about this: emissions are down since the baseline in 2005, significantly over 30 per cent, but in the past two years there has been an uptick. On the reporting of these matters we do not agree. The government should stick with its approach; the government should not be trying to tweak this for its own purposes.

I think I have said enough about this bill. It needs to be seen in the context of the surging electricity and gas costs that are being faced across the state at the moment. Small businesses are being clobbered with surging gas costs. We are seeing businesses unable to continue because of the gas issues of reliability of supply and cost, and we are seeing small businesses facing real trouble because of the issues of reliability of supply of electricity and the surging costs. And we are seeing families thumped – everyday families in Victoria being absolutely smashed month after month after month.

The truth is that energy costs were significantly lower in 2014. Those costs bundled along at the bottom of the level. Then they surged and surged and somewhat plateaued for a year, but the plateau is far higher than it was before. It is an absolute smash onto everyday families, who are now paying far more for their energy bills. It needs to be seen in the light of that. The energy upgrades strategic review done by the department itself, reviewing its own homework, is entirely unsatisfactory. I pay tribute here to some of the work that is done by St Vincent's, Gavin Dufty and his group, for their very detailed analysis of small business costs for gas and electricity and their very detailed analysis of gas and electricity costs for households, and they are the reliable indicator. The ABS figures also make it very clear that there is a problematic increase in costs. We also have this issue of uncertainty of supply, and this is entirely from the state government's own decisions, its own mistakes. Let us be clear here: the Andrews and Allan Labor governments have now been in power for almost 11 years. They are in their 11th year, and those surges in electricity costs and the surges in gas costs are entirely their responsibility. They have had 11 years to deal with this, and in fact the position has deteriorated in terms of cost and reliability of supply. We all understand the move to net zero, we get what is going on, but you do have a responsibility to make sure that there is continuity of supply and reliability of supply, and that families are not absolutely smashed by these energy charges. So I think it is important to see all of that in the right context here as well.

I want to say something about the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 as well. This bill does a number of things. It amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998 to make some further requirements in terms of bushfire mitigation. It seeks to abolish the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee, and I will say more about that in a minute. It provides additional enforcement powers, and some of these powers seem draconian, and some industry participants have been very clear with us about the scale of these changes. It changes

references to ‘enforcement officers’ to ‘authorised officers’. It provides that a court can make adverse publicity orders in relation to offenders. When it amends the Gas Safety Act 1997 it provides further in relation to enforcement and related powers, including additional entry powers. Again, these seem a little bit of an overreach. It changes all references to ‘inspectors’ to ‘authorised officers’. It puts increased penalties in. These are big surges in penalties – massive surges in penalties. I am not sure whether this is going to make the difference that the government imagines. It amends the Pipelines Act 2005 to provide additional powers of entry and to provide that a court may make adverse publicity orders, and it amends the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 to provide Energy Safe Victoria the ability to only provide its corporate plan every three years, and any updates in between are to be provided to the minister in secret. We are very cautious about that. It amends the Land Act 1958 to clarify that the minister administering the act is not prevented from entering into certain agreements to lease government land for the purpose of various works related to the energy system.

There are a number of problems with this bill, and we do have a set of amendments, which have been distributed. The proposed amendments do effectively three things. The first relates to a number of the statutorily protected consultative committees, the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee, and we seek to amend the legislation to ensure that these committees are not disbanded and that the status quo remains. We oppose the government’s ongoing attack on independent expert advice. This is a nasty government. It hates independent advice.

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** No, no, no. This is what is going on. We saw it with the Public Record Office Victoria. They wanted to abolish the independent advice committee. In the case of the electric line clearance committee, this is a quite a large committee with stakeholders, experts and technical people from across the sector. It has statutory underpinnings as we speak today, and it provides advice to the Minister for Energy and Resources. But you know what – it has provided advice that the minister for energy did not like. It has advised that with respect to line clearance, particularly in the city – not in bushfire-prone areas – where you have the electric lines you could cut much closer rather than more distantly from the lines. They have looked around the world and at other jurisdictions and they have looked at every technical argument, and they have come back and said, ‘Actually, by cutting less often and less deep, we can actually get a better outcome. It’s cheaper. And there’s probably a billion dollars – one thousand million dollars – in value of tree canopy that can be preserved.’ We have got a dense city. It is getting denser and getting hotter. If you knock down houses with tree canopy, and you build great, concrete monstrosities with no trees or tiny boxes along the front, it gets pretty hot. But actually here is a thoughtful expert committee, and it said, ‘We can do this differently. It’s cheaper, and we get a billion dollars worth of extra tree canopy.’ I have FOI-ed their minutes, and I have read them. I am still in dispute on a Deloitte report that the government does not want to provide and some additional matters, but the actual minutes are very clear. I have read them cover to cover, and I pay tribute to the committee and the people that are on it. They are from councils, they are from line authorities, they are from right across the whole technical gamut.

But the minister does not like that recommendation. The minister apparently went nuts when she heard it. And you know what the minister wants to do now – she wants to abolish the committee and get rid of the independent umpire. It is actually pretty nasty; it is pretty ugly what she is doing. Why? Why would you seek to pull the statutory underpinning from a committee that is comprised of all sorts of complex technical experts who have got knowledge that none of us in this chamber have? President, you might have a bit more because of your trade background; you might have more than many.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, a number. I am making that point. But this committee, and the electrolysis committee likewise, are not party-political committees; they are technical expert committees. But this minister wants to kill them, figuratively, because they have given advice that she did not like. This is ‘shoot the messenger’, ‘kill the umpire’. It is actually profoundly disturbing that the minister would

seek to nobble an independent advisory committee that has gone to so much work and thought about this so closely. There are expert council officers on this too, and all of them can see their municipalities would look better, the process of tree clipping would be cheaper and we would end up with more tree canopy at a time when we are worried about heat island effects in our cities.

I really sound a note of alarm at the approach of this minister; it is a shocker, an absolute shocker. So we will seek to stop that abolition of this committee. Maybe the numbers are there in the chamber for the crossbench to join with the government and overwhelm this, but this is a very thoughtful and sincere approach that we have adopted here. We have said, 'We've consulted with those people.' I mean, they would be shot if they were found by this minister to be talking to the opposition – my goodness. Figuratively, they would be treated quite poorly. And in this case they are certainly disbanding the committee. This committee is going, and the electrolysis committee likewise, so part of our amendments is to say, 'No, we won't support this.' On the tabling of the annual report, we ask: why can't this just be tabled as part of the annual report of the department or Energy Safe? What is going on here? Why do we need to stop the public seeing the latest corporate plan for Energy Safe Victoria? Why is that? We do not agree with that, and we will oppose that.

Regarding the bill's power for agreement to lease unreserved Crown land that is subject to the Environment Effects Act 1978 for projects under section 134 of the Land Act, we would seek to impose a transparency requirement – so the minister has to publish the value of the agreements and so forth at the time. We think this is eminently reasonable. We do not agree with the draconian approach that has been adopted by this minister. We do not think that this is the right way forward. The government says, 'Oh well, we are going to do some sort of regulatory impact statement on this.' Well, I say they should get moving. They should have got moving on some of the advice of the line clearance committee a lot earlier instead of dithering and delaying.

But either way, we do not agree with this idea of abolishing the independent technical advice committees. We think that this is the wrong approach. One of the things I will say here is the government is getting a lot of this quite wrong, and they are getting it wrong because they are not listening to the technical experts. It is time they actually engaged with the technical experts more closely. There are ways forward.

Going back to the VEET bill, we think this strategic review should be conducted entirely openly and entirely independently, and it should be released before the bill goes through. We think if the independent review was to come up with the right answers and come up with reforms, it may well be that the energy efficiency and energy upgrades program could be improved. We could get a program that is closer to the cost of schemes in other states for the amount of abatement achieved, and that could be done safely as well. Safety is an important consideration, thinking back to what happened with pink batts. We accept that the minister is certainly thinking about that, but we are not at all convinced that the independent advice that is needed to guarantee that has actually been heeded in the right way.

To be clear, there is a set of amendments for both of these bills. They are carefully thought-through amendments, and we would urge the chamber to support them.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:33): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. As my colleague Ellen Sandell explained in the lower house, the Greens will be also supporting this bill to extend and improve the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) scheme. It has never been more urgent to transition Victorian homes and businesses off fossil gas and expensive, polluting and dangerous fossil fuel and onto cheap, clean renewable power. Victoria consumes more gas than any other Australian state or territory. About 88 per cent of our homes still have to use it instead of cheaper, safer electric alternatives – that means split system air conditioners, hot-water heaters and induction cooktops.

All the fossil fuel gas used in our homes, businesses and electricity generators is just a small fraction of the gas Australia sends offshore. Around 80 per cent of Australia's gas is exported by global gas companies as liquefied natural gas, basically for free, with the gas industry paying zero royalties on more than half of it. This country is one of the top exporters of LNG in the world, along with Qatar, and when planet earth has already basically breached the 1.5 degree target and we are seeing increased heat, bushfires, droughts and storms, that really needs to change. We also should not even be considering new gas projects like Viva's ludicrous new idea to import gas into Australia at Corio Bay. Never mind banning just those new projects, Australia should really be shutting down existing projects if we are going to survive the next century of a climate collapse. But homes and businesses need help to make that transition, and that is what the VEU does by subsidising new energy-efficient products. So again the Greens support this bill, which first and foremost extends the program from its 2030 deadline through to the end of 2045, effectively safeguarding it against any future coalition governments.

We particularly support the new power for a future VEU program targeting vulnerable and low-income consumers. This is something that stakeholders have been calling for for years to make sure poor households are not left behind in the transition to cheaper, more energy-efficient households. While we understand the nature of the VEU scheme means there will be certain logistical challenges, the government has to work through to develop this kind of program. We would urge Labor to make this a priority.

The bill also allows discounts for government-mandated upgrades, which were previously ineligible due to the VEU's additionality requirement. That includes the forthcoming minimum standards for renters, which we are really hoping to see from Labor soon. Ideally that means Victoria could end up with something like the ACT scheme, where the government gives landlords a deadline to upgrade their properties and then provides financial support to make those changes.

The Greens support other changes through this bill: the new enforcement tools for the regulator, the Essential Services Commission; increased flexibility of Victorian energy efficiency certificate surrender deadlines; and the plans for the new interim targets for 2026 and 2027 to allow future targets to incorporate the findings of the current two-year strategic review.

Finally, the Greens were happy to hear Minister Lily D'Ambrosio announce that from next year the VEU will include ceiling insulation. This is a decent reform which will make insulation so much more accessible for Victorians stuck in what are really glorified tents who cannot afford the upgrade. We commend the minister for this reform, and while we would like to see it apply in two other forms – wall and floor insulation – we assume this will be a kind of staggered rollout and those types are coming down the track. As such, the Greens would like to withdraw our amendment requiring all forms of insulation be added to the scheme. Our proposal was slightly different to the one the minister had laid out. We were going to tie insulation to the residential efficiency scorecard to give households holistic advice before applying for an upgrade, and we would still encourage households to apply for one of those assessments. This means that we will also withdraw our amendment giving the government the power to add an energy storage program to the scheme.

We understand that this is a bold proposal – emissions savings from energy storage can be much harder to assess than, say, removing a gas heater – but we would still encourage Labor to pursue this idea in the long term to support households who may already have solar panels but may need that extra bit of support to install batteries.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:38): I rise to speak in strong support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 and also the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. These two bills are complementary, addressing both sides of the energy transition equation. One drives the uptake of energy efficiency technologies that cut emissions and lower costs, the other ensures that our energy system evolves and

the safety and reliability Victorians rely upon is maintained, and together they are essential for delivering an affordable, safe and zero-emission energy future.

I would love to say that the Victorian energy upgrades bill also strengthens the Victorian energy upgrades program, the VEU, ensuring it continues to deliver cost-of-living relief, emissions reductions and investment certainty. Since 2009 over 2.5 million households and businesses have benefited from the VEU. Households save an average of \$110 per year and businesses on average \$3700, with large upgrades delivering savings in the tens of thousands.

I had the good fortune last week of going out to Yarraville with the member for Footscray Katie Hall and meeting residents who had benefited from the VEU scheme. They just loved telling me how much, because of the VEU, their energy bills had completely dived. In fact some had now no energy bills because they also installed a battery. The stories about working people upgrading their homes are incredibly powerful. They need to be heard more, because this is not a fantasy that lives elsewhere. This very much is in the homes and lives and bank balances of Victorians, and the benefits of the VEU extend to much more than just the individual bill savings, because every single upgrade that is done reduces demand on the grid and lowers wholesale electricity prices.

Between 2021 and 2025 the VEU is projected to save \$3.8 billion in energy system costs. I have got to tell you, this means that even those who have not participated are going to see some lower bills. For communities in Northern Metro – from the renters in Brunswick to small businesses in Coburg – this program is critical. Too many are still grappling with some high energy costs, and this bill ensures that they can access affordable, efficient renewable energy solutions.

At its core, the bill extends the VEU program's legislated end date from 2030 to 2045, aligning with our net zero target for Victoria, providing some long-term certainty to industry and ensuring that households can continue upgrading from polluting gas appliances to cleaner electric alternatives. Some opposites have claimed that this extension is premature due to the ongoing review of the VEU, but the review really is about improving the program, not about questioning its very existence and leaving industry in limbo. It really would be an irresponsible move. You see, certainty drives investments, it creates jobs and it absolutely delivers for consumers.

The bill also adjusts how VEU targets are set, introducing a two-year tranche for 2026–27 to allow some flexibility post our review. Critically, the bill strengthens the Essential Services Commission's compliance powers, enabling it to issue improvements and prohibition notices, mandate some training and enforce civil penalties. Consumer trust is vital, and with a complaint rate of just 0.13 per cent across the 200,000 activities that were conducted in 2024, the VEU really does have an incredibly strong track record. This bill ensures it stays that way.

Further, the bill clarifies the additionality requirement, ensuring upgrades that become mandated under other laws can still qualify for the VEU discounts, and this is essential as we explore mandating efficiency standards for rentals, which is especially important, I have got to tell you, in the Northern Metro Region, where we have got some older housing stock and there are also some high energy costs – and they absolutely intersect. Outdated restrictions on certificate vintage have also been removed, aligning Victoria with best practice in other jurisdictions and improving Victorian market liquidity and flexibility for retailers.

Importantly, this bill lays the legislative groundwork to better target VEU discounts to vulnerable and low-income consumers, which we know is really important. For renters in Coburg, for public housing tenants in Brunswick and for multigenerational households in Epping this is a vital reform. The VEU is just one pillar of Victoria's broader energy strategy, alongside the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, the revival of the SEC and record renewables investments.

Victoria leads the nation in climate action. We have legislated targets of 65 per cent renewable energy by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. We are delivering nation-leading storage targets of 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. It is all happening fast, and our offshore wind targets are amongst the

most ambitious in Australia. We are decarbonising here in Victoria at the fastest rate in the country, with emissions already having been reduced by 31.3 per cent from the 2005 levels by 2022. We are legislating ambitious renewable and energy storage targets by decarbonising faster than any other state and delivering the lowest wholesale electricity prices nationally. Programs like the VEU absolutely are critical to this success.

What we heard earlier were some contributions by Mr Davis, and what I can say is that their history on energy policy is one of neglect and denial. I recall very much that they opposed the SEC renewable energy legislation and have even tried to abolish the VEU. Their criticism of this bill is really a continuation of a backwards approach, because Victorians absolutely deserve better. They understand that climate action is about jobs, it is about the cost of living and it is about justice. Energy upgrades to the VEU mean lower bills for struggling families; they mean new jobs for electricians and installers, healthier homes and a fairer, more just transition. The VEU currently supports 2200 jobs; whether improving comfort for older residents in Rezza, creating apprenticeships in Northcote or helping small businesses in Thommo, the VEU delivers tangible local benefits. This bill ensures these benefits continue smarter, fairer and stronger for decades to come.

Now I am going to take some time to talk about the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This bill is fundamentally about keeping Victorians safe and making sure Energy Safe Victoria (ESV), the independent regulator, remains resourced and agile. As we transition from a centralised fossil fuel based system to a decentralised renewable-powered future, new safety risks do emerge. Whether they are rooftop solar or home batteries, EVs, wind farms or other technologies, they are absolutely reshaping how we generate and use electricity and energy. Our current safety framework, designed for a different era, is not fully equipped to manage the challenges of today and tomorrow. This bill modernises Victoria's energy safety laws, ensuring Energy Safe Victoria has the tools, powers and flexibility it needs to keep Victorians safe. It introduces new powers, updates penalties, streamlines governance and reduces unnecessary red tape all whilst maintaining safety insight.

A key reform is the introduction of a new entry power for ESV officers, allowing them to enter premises with a magistrate's court warrant to investigate risks, monitor compliance and take enforcement action. Currently ESV cannot enter residential premises without consent, even when there are serious safety risks present. This gap limits their ability to act swiftly. This new warrant-based power addresses this, while maintaining judicial oversight. Enforcement tools are expanding with prohibition and improvement notices and injunction and adverse publicity orders. These ensure that serious breaches are transparently addressed and deter unsafe practices for electrical workers and contractors. ESV gains the power to immediately suspend licences where public safety is at risk. This targeted power prevents unsafe operators from continuing dangerous work during investigations. Penalties under the Electrical Safety Act 1998 and Gas Safety Act 1997 have been updated to reflect the seriousness of the breaches. For example, knowingly installing unsafe electrical equipment will now attract penalties of 240 units for individuals and 1200 units for body corporates, aligning with other regulatory frameworks. For minor offences, the bill allows ESV to issue infringement notices, enabling swift action and freeing up resources for much more complex enforcement matters. These reforms ensure that ESV can effectively regulate new technologies, enforce compliance and protect communities as the energy sector evolves. Maintaining consumer confidence is essential to our fast and safe transition aspirations for the future.

This bill also addresses bushfire risks through changing bushfire mitigation plan submissions from annual to every five years, reducing that administrative burden while maintaining the oversight necessary, as ESV retains the power to require revisions as necessary. Governance reforms include abolishing the Electrical Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee. While historically valuable, I must say their prescriptive structures have really become barriers to effective consultation. This bill enables more flexible and targeted engagement with experts and with stakeholders.

This bill establishes a three-year corporate planning cycle while continuing with annual report updates, balancing strategic planning with transparency and accountability. The bill also amends the Land Act 1958 to clarify that the Minister for Environment can enter into agreements to lease over unreserved Crown land during an environment effects statement process, or EES, as it is known. This provides investment certainty for strategically important projects like, for example, major renewable developments while maintaining rigorous environmental oversight. These agreements are conditional on EES outcomes and are expected to impact only a small number of critical projects across the state.

The reforms in this bill have been developed through close consultation with industry, unions and government stakeholders. Can I take the time to acknowledge the Electrical Trades Union and the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union and their strong support for the reforms relevant to their sectors. As is known to both of those unions, I began my career in fact in the electrical safety office, so the safety of electrical workers is something very dear to my heart. Knowing that with this bill before us today we will further strengthen safety for electrical workers and installers, it is something that I fulsomely support.

Energy Safe Victoria has absolutely been a key partner in shaping these changes to ensure that they reflect the operational realities and the enforcement needs. I know almost 20 years ago, when I conducted that work in electrical safety, I could never have imagined the complexity of today's energy system. But now, as I am getting my head around the enormous change in front of us, I know that the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 ensures that as Victoria's energy sector evolves, our safety framework evolves with it. It strengthens the power of our regulator, aligns penalties with contemporary standards, improves governance, reduces red tape and supports critical investment, all while keeping Victorians safe. This bill is not just about addressing current gaps, it is about futureproofing Victoria's energy safety framework for the challenges ahead. It ensures the benefits of the energy transition are realised safely, reliably and sustainably.

Together, these two bills demonstrate the Allan Labor government's commitment to a future where Victorians have access to affordable, reliable and safe energy. They represent smart forward-looking policy that balances innovation and responsibility. Those opposite can continue to play politics, but on this side of the chamber we are focused on delivering for Victorians, whether it is through lower energy bills, safer homes, new jobs or a cleaner environment. These bills deliver real outcomes for our community. With that, can I say on behalf of the Allan Labor government: I commend both these bills to the house.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:53): I am pleased to rise today to make a cognate debate on two bills put forward by the government this afternoon, the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 and the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. I think any and all governments should certainly be looking to provide energy-efficient homes and energy-efficient options for our homes, our families, our single people, our elderly and our businesses and upgrade appliances, lights, fridges and air conditioners and the like. This has been the focus of this particular rollout and this particular program. But, as my colleague Mr Davis said, unfortunately it has been anything but successful. It has truly been maladministered, and this government and the previous government certainly have had a track record of botching rollouts.

I have been around long enough to recall in 2009–10 the rollout of a then revolutionary government program in education called the Ultranet. Indeed we had an all-singing, all-dancing cast. I am going to quote the line from the Ultranet rollout, which cost some hundreds of thousands of dollars: 'We are living in a virtual world, and I am an Ultranet girl.' This was sung to the tune of a Madonna song from back in the day. It was heralded as being a wonderful platform for educators, for teachers, for families, for students et cetera. And what happened on the day of the implementation of its final rollout? We all stood there behind our computers with bated breath – it dived, it stalled, it crashed and it crawled away. If we look at another Labor invention from back in the day – and I remember this one too; it was a long time ago, back in 2008 I think – the Myki rollout: well, it was rolled out, it rolled over and it

needs to roll under a tree and under the bed and fall away. All the time over in New South Wales they have been able to tap on with a thing called an Opal card, or even their credit card or their savings card, and use public transport. So this government has a track record over the course of the last 20 years of botching the rollout of what could be reasonable programs. Well, this is the purview of this particular energy upgrades program that we are looking at today.

Again, the idea about improving prices and improving efficiency is a noble one, but what have we seen under the government in recent years? We have seen energy prices rise, rise, rise – not go down, down, down but go up, up, up. They have risen significantly, and this is not from me, this is from the Essential Services Commission. For the Victorian default offer the prices increased by approximately 25 per cent in the 2023–24 period. We are seeing increases. I heard my colleague Mr Davis reference St Vincent de Paul. They are doing some very good work, some very strategic work and some very important work on keeping track of the changes of residential energy prices and energy tariffs and reporting back. They have been doing that for the broader community since 2010, and they have documented ever increasing pressures on Victorian consumers. In a 2023 report from St Vincent de Paul we see that, and I am quoting this, ‘prices are high and innovation is low’.

It is important to look at a mix of energy forms and a mix of structures, but we heard the previous member crowing about the importance of offshore wind energy. Well, this government and the federal government have not got their act together with respect to that. They cannot decide on whether they are going to have an energy infrastructure terminal at Hastings. They cannot decide whether they are going somewhere else or whether it will be shoved off far, far away, over to Tasmania, because this state government cannot get its act together. So to crow about it is one thing, but the reality is it is not going to meet those targets by the time required. That, unfortunately, has an impact on Victorians across the board. Of course there are also concerns for people in my community about transmission lines turning into a spaghetti factory but also about the impact of those offshore wind turbines on fishing and fish beds and that industry. So there are many things to be done by this government; it is just not necessarily doing them well by any stretch. I concur with Mr Davis that the Nationals and the Liberals will certainly not be supporting this bill/ However, we are calling on the government to come to some sensible amendments.

Also, you only have to google it and you can get some good footage of, very sadly, this system being rorted. My office had particular traffic back in the day where constituents were very frustrated at being cold-called again and again and again and doorknocked again and again by persistent people wanting to sell these and of course make a profit on the system. This one was not from my electorate, but there is an example where this 92-year-old woman – just think of that – is in her own home and is trying to be sustainable, and she has been repeatedly receiving telemarketing calls every day for 12 months, despite repeatedly asking to be removed from the contact list. These are some of the things that have been facing many people across Victoria. It was then banned and there was a sigh of relief, but it does not reduce the fact that many of these shysters were actually trying to rip off the government and therefore, in effect, also still rip off the taxpayer, because at the end of the day it comes back to being included in taxpayers bills and government mismanagement. We have seen that the Victorian energy upgrades program has certainly been botched through and through.

In relation to the oversight and the regulation, we see that there seems to not be that proper administration and controls, and we certainly see that there was gaming of that system that I have just been referring to. What happens is ultimately the cost of the gaming, of the inadequacies and of the rorting – the cost of this program – ends up impacting on Victorians’ power bills. It is always passed on, and this system has been mismanaged, as I have said.

We go to an article this morning in the *Australian Financial Review* talking about energy and talking about electricity, and we heard the Greens talking about gas and how terrible gas is. Well, we know that gas is a very important peaking energy supply, not only for industry, for homes, for restaurants and all of that but also for feedstock for very important industries. Again, because of the lack of supply and the huge cost, we have seen that there was a collapse in 2024 of the plastics maker Qenos and the

loss of around 700 jobs. Where does this go? This also still impacts our productivity and the lives and futures of Australians and indeed those good people who live in and around that area in Altona. The government are living in a virtual world, and I think they often just feel that it is virtual money and it is not going to impact Victorians. Well, it does indeed.

If we look to the other bill that I would like to speak to, which is the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 that we are speaking on in cognate debate, again the Nationals and the Liberals are not in favour of this bill. We feel that it is not addressing some of those key issues. One of the things that we are comfortable with and that is a positive step in this bill, though, is in relation to the bushfire mitigation plans and the requirement for power supply companies to move from an annual basis of reporting to every five years for those plans. This seems like one of the few sensible reforms out of that one.

In relation to powerlines, particularly in my Eastern Victoria Region, we know that during bushfires power supply is all critical – indeed not only bushfires but in terms of windstorms, and we have certainly had our share of storms and mini tornadoes in Eastern Victoria Region. South of Latrobe Valley the beautiful Mirboo North has certainly seen one of those. I know that our local power supply company, AusNet, has been working really feverishly to improve its response in times of crisis and emergencies and to certainly provide that more rapid response to get electricity back on for homes. If you do not have your electricity – particularly if you are in a storm situation and you have had your solar panels ripped off the house – it is often very challenging to get that energy supply to boot up your phone, and of course our phones are our connection to the outside world. One of the key things that I know that both Powercor and AusNet have been working on is indeed the rapid earth fault current limiter.

That technology has been rolled out over time, and this was from some of the recommendations out of the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's assessment of the terrible 2019–2020 fires, when we saw shocking devastation right across the eastern part of the state and in my Eastern Victoria electorate. Certainly it is important for those rollouts, and they have occurred across the state – and I note there was an article recently in Wonthaggi as well – but of course that is at the footprint at the minute. Indeed I understand that this technology being rolled out is actually the size of Belgium, and those areas are now hopefully supported so that, if there is damage to powerlines, they can be short-circuited and stopped before a fire can get hold. These are very important activities. But of course the lines are continuing to grow as well.

I think that is all that my contribution needs to be. We are concerned that this government has spent a lot of money and a lot of time wasting taxpayer money. We do not support these two bills. We do ask the house to consider the Liberals and Nationals amendments, and with that I will conclude my remarks.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:06): I am proud to stand and support these bills. I am a little bit perplexed to follow on from the opposition speakers' comments, but I will come back to that in good time. I am proud to be speaking on these two pieces of legislation, because they are all about driving down Victorian households' power bills and they are about providing jobs. This is what we are doing year in, year out through the work that we have done across Victoria's energy network and the work that we have done in Victorians' homes.

We started off by taking the low-hanging fruit and reducing the amount of energy that people consume in their home. I am sure those opposite nearly had heart attacks when there was work going on to replace incandescent light globes, with lower energy consuming appliances – oh my gosh, how outrageous, how crazy. Just starting from that point and going all the way on, we have seen over a period of time energy demand from households in Victoria drop. This matters to Victorians, because that means when you use less of something, you pay less for it. Fancy that: you use less of something, you pay less money out of your pocket, out of your wallet.

If there is one thing the last couple of weeks have shown us, it is that Victorians and indeed Australians want to see policies that reduce their cost of living. They want to see policies that keep more money in their own pockets. That is why I am proud to be in a government and in a party that has committed long-term to reducing energy costs for Victorians, and the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program delivers on just that. It is helping hundreds of thousands of Victorians, whether it is to reduce their consumption, whether it is to change the energy supply or whether it is getting PV on their roofs so they can create their own electricity. I do not know if it is just in our DNA in Australia, but we love being able to operate with a bit of freedom, operate how we want to, and I tell you what, when you can support Victorians to reduce the amount of energy they need and then also support them to generate the electricity that they need, that is a feeling and that is something they passionately want to do.

When you go out and talk to some of the Victorians that make up the 2.2 gigawatts of solar panels on Victorian households, a lot of them will tell you that they want to generate their own power and they want to perhaps give a little bit of lip to the providers. But those opposite are not for that. They are absolutely for centralised power generation. They do not know how it will be generated, but they do not want Victorians to save money and they do not want Victorians to be off the chain and to be able to generate and do what they want to do. Things like heat pumps – when you are talking 2 kilowatts to heat the water for a home, why not do it? Why have an ideological hatred for it? Why have an ideological opposition to it?

All these energy upgrades, through saving every single household's energy consumption by lowering it, we are actually lowering demand on the grid, and that is lowering the cost of power for all Victorians. I do not think anyone on that side actually understands how the generation network, how the grid and how retail actually work. They just sit there and espouse all these motherhood statements. I have written quite a few of them down, which I was going to come to later in my speech, but I might raise a few now. We have heard things about jingles: 'Rise, rise, rise', 'Down, down, down', 'Virtual this'. David Davis sounded very much like Trump talking about things being 'nasty, nasty, nasty' and 'scheme, scheme'. There was a lot of hyperbole – a lot of very, very wild words – but what I can tell you there was not on that side was anything that resembled policy, anything that seemed to have drawn from a set of values that might put on the horizon some sort of plan to present to Victorians. There was nothing of that. I get criticised from time to time. I talk about Jeff Kennett and what he did during the 1990s, but the best they could muster on that side was to talk about pink batts and talk about some fridges from years ago. How about fronting up to the Victorian people – front up – and actually telling them what you are going to do? But you cannot, because you do not know what you believe in, because you are not able to formulate a set of values that can then make a set of policies that you can take to the public. I do not want to talk too much about the federal election, but it only was eight or nine days ago. We have seen what happens when you front up with nothing, when it is just divisiveness, division and fear – and that is exactly what has happened in the energy space for two decades.

We heard Ms Bath talking about the offshore wind industry. That offshore wind industry sat on Angus Taylor's desk for years when he was federal energy minister. It sat on the desk until the 2019 election. From that point Labor have been able to get on with getting the offshore wind system established, getting the framework in place, putting some points along a timeline and having targets and mechanisms to get there. That is very different to what the Liberal–Nationals did – driven by the Queensland lobby of the National Party, driving Liberal–National policy all around the country. The best they could come up with was nuclear reactors. I hate to say I told you so, but I will tell you what, probably 15, 18 months ago you started this – and I do not mean to be rude – drivel about small modular nuclear reactors: 'We're going to have a small modular nuclear reactor down at Anglesea, and we're going to put one in the valley.' Yes, another one has left the chamber. Small modular nuclear reactors do not exist. 'Oh, well, you know, you don't need to give voters anything in reality. Just use fear and division and drivel, and it's alright, they'll vote for us. It worked for Trump. It worked for Trump! Just do it. You don't need to put time into developing policy; just see if we can get away with it.' And do you know what happened? As we got closer and closer to the federal election, and Australians and indeed Victorians were asking where their energy is going to come from for the next

two decades as we transition our energy generation capacity, there was nothing. There was absolutely nothing. Contrast that with Labor, federally and state, aligned with clear targets and clear technologies to roll out and generate the power we need and coming along with additional policies like home batteries. That again comes back to Victorians' and Australians' sense of wanting to provide for themselves. In the situation of storms, as was highlighted on the other side, they had no solutions to what happens in the storms, just saying, 'Oh, storms can happen and powerlines can fall down. That's the fault of renewables or it's a fault of this or it's a fault of that.' Fear, division et cetera – insert standard lines. Here is a policy, an investment, that enables batteries to go into your home. Do you know what? If those storms do hit, you have got back-up. Do you know what else? It is taking demand off the grid more broadly. And they stand over there like they are saying something incredible that no-one knows, 'Gas can be used in peaking.' Yes, of course it can, but it is darned expensive. In the US they cannot get a gas turbine for four years. They cannot get them, because they have not got tooled up enough to build the things.

If we are going to be trying to put more gas turbines in, something we do not need – if we are going to invest in something that is about 250 bucks a megawatt in comparison to Victoria, when we are looking at wholesale rates of about \$50 a megawatt – let us get serious. Let us get absolutely serious; do not stand and talk out the side of your mouths. The Liberal–National parties are saying this sort of hyperbole or whatever – thanks, Dr Heath, for trying to help me out with that word before.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** Mr Davis pronounced it like that, so I am just following that pronunciation. But get serious about presenting something to the Victorian people. I am really proud that this side does that. It does not matter whether it is in health, whether it is in education, whether it is in transport infrastructure or whether it is in housing: whatever it is, we bring a plan, and it is the same in energy.

I just come back to it again: cost of living is so important to people when we look at the inflationary impacts. Mr Davis over there said – and these are his words – 'Over the last 11 years of Labor power prices plateaued along, plateaued along and then spiked.' You know what, Mr Davis: there was a little thing called Ukraine. You know what happens around the world when energy prices go up? You get inflationary pressure, because everything depends on energy, whether it is homes, whether it is business, whether it is government assets. That is why energy is so darn important, and that is why it is too important to talk out the sides of your mouths. The federal Liberals, when they were in power for nine years, had 20 different energy policies. Every time a new media adviser rolled through they would roll something else out, because it is not underpinned by values; it is all just hyperbolic rubbish.

And it is very interesting today of all days that the Liberals have elected their new federal leader and their new deputy, Ted O'Brien. What has Ted O'Brien been running around the country for the last year doing? He has been spouting nuclear. So where are you guys?

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** Do not roll your eyes and laugh. As the alternative form of government, that is your answer to Victorians. And if it is not your answer, come here and tell us what your answer is. We all know that you do not have an answer. You have got absolutely nothing to bring to the table.

Back to Mr Davis's point: he was saying that it plateaued and then it went up. Have a look at energy prices around the country and have a look at energy prices around the world – they all went up because of the Ukraine war. Mr Davis likes to cherrypick, he likes to pull his points out and he likes to use his negative words like 'scheme' and 'nasty' and all this sort of stuff. But he is the alternative energy minister, and he should front up to Victorians and provide an alternative plan, because you know what their alternative plan is going to be? They are going to turn around and they are going to rip up farms to frack gas, because there is no other option. The Liberals are going to have to cut up pristine agricultural farmland to get gas to be able to run generators in this state, because we know that they are vehemently, ideologically opposed to renewables, which we know are the cheapest form of energy.

I was just talking about some of those wholesale rates before. When you are talking 50 bucks a megawatt here in Victoria and when you are talking \$150 a megawatt up in Queensland and New South Wales, where they are dependent on black coal, follow the economics. You are meant to be a party founded on economics. I do not know what Menzies would be thinking. He would be absolutely rolling over, going, ‘What on earth is going on with the Liberal Party?’

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** Do not take my word for it – have a look at the federal election. How many seats have you guys got left? Do you have one safe federal Liberal seat left in this state? No, you do not, because you have been wallowing along with this negativity.

Energy and climate are just one space. We know there are whole areas where you would rather divide our population. In the energy space you are trying to divide metro and regional, but you do it in lots of others: ‘Let’s try and divide people on their sexuality, on their gender’ or whatever it might be. You will not come to the table with policies, as I have said, to identify a plan. It is just this constant negativity, and that constant negativity and that constant lack of a plan actually see prices increase. The one constant you hear from industry is they want certainty; industry wants certainty. You could almost hear the collective sigh of relief when it became very clear very early on last Saturday night that in the federal election Labor had won and things were not going to be scrapped; we were not going to have another massive lurch to the side, heading for nuclear. That was very, very clear. Industry want certainty, and when we get that certainty, we get investment. I will tell you what: there was nobody lining up to invest in nuclear.

I should not talk about it as a past thing, because maybe it is not dead. Tim Wilson loves it and Ted O’Brien has been spouting it, so I am sure you are all waiting to take your marching orders as to what it is that you believe in –

**A member** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** That is right – what the Nationals are going to tell you out of Queensland, what your policy will be. But it is that lack of certainty that creates the vacuum that then sees prices go up.

Mr Davis was again just throwing these comments around without any foundation in truth or reality or zooming out and looking at the bigger picture of the energy market, which is why I am so proud to be part of a government that has done exactly that – that has identified our values, created the policies and set out a clear plan that we are not only meeting, we are beating, whether it is on our emission reduction or whether it is on our generation ability and driving prices down, seeing the lowest wholesale rates around Australia right here in Victoria.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:21): I have no idea what that rant was about – certainly not much to do with energy. He covered Trump; he covered the Queensland Nationals, I believe. But I would like to extend my sincere congratulations, through the Chair, to Mr McIntosh on doing his first ever speech in this house without mentioning Kennett.

**Tom McIntosh:** No, I did.

**Renee HEATH:** Oh, sorry. I withdraw. He did. I withdraw; he did mention Kennett. I did mislead the house – my mistake.

I am staggered by this government, who without fail get up there time after time after time and spout mistruths – just completely dishonest lies, to be honest. I do not know if it is because Mr McIntosh is not in his office and does not have staff there most of the time, so the constituents wander round and come to my office and speak to me, but what they are talking about is the increase in power bills, how they are going through the roof, and I cannot understand it.

Let me just correct a few things. One of the things he said was, ‘You’ve got to follow the economics.’ Well, the facts are – and I have spoken about this before – that those nations with the highest share of

renewables in electricity supply have higher costs. Those nations with the higher shares of wind and solar renewables have the highest cost. Those are Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Spain. And those countries with the lowest share of renewables when it comes to wind and solar have the lowest costs. They are Russia, Saudi Arabia, Korea, India and China. So what I am saying is you cannot trust what he says, because the facts just do not match up with reality.

Now, I am pro clean energy; I am pro renewables. What I am anti is Labor lies and Labor spin. Wind and solar can only be commercially successful when they are in the receipt of a subsidy. And guess who is going to pay for that subsidy? Victorians, because Victorians are already paying the price of the mismanagement of the Labor Party. So I just think it is unbelievable.

Ms Watt spoke about energy costs going down; it is just not the reality. Even Mr McIntosh mentioned that; he blamed it, of course, on Ukraine, which was another thing he spoke about in his random contribution. The fact is energy costs are going through the roof in this state. The people in this state are living through a horrific cost-of-living crisis, first and foremost caused by the state and federal Labor governments' policies, which of course have been exacerbated by their inability to keep crime off worksites in Victoria, by their inability to manage budgets and by their inability to treat taxpayer dollars with a bit of respect. I just think it is unbelievable.

The other thing Mr McIntosh spoke about – where did I write that down? He just had so many ridiculous things, quite frankly, that he said. He said that it is about reducing bills, which, cross, they have not done, and that it is about providing jobs. I am just going to respond to that one for a minute, providing jobs. Let us just talk about our electorate alone, Mr McIntosh and Minister Shing, the Eastern Victoria Region. You have obliterated jobs in the Eastern Victoria Region. What about the 4000 jobs that were lost from the native timber industry? You have never replaced the 1000 jobs that were axed with the closure of Hazelwood. I just think it is time for you potentially to have a look in the mirror, stop reading your propaganda points and maybe start talking to some constituents, who you have been put there to serve. I just think those are a few things to just start off with.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** Mr McIntosh, you cannot direct a member about what sort of speech they are allowed to give. Surely you would know that. Your obsession with the coalition continues. I would say 14 out of the 15 minutes were about all sorts of bizarre things and not much to do with energy. It has been a long time since you have been the party of the workers – a very, very long time. I think Labor used to be a pretty good political party. That was a very, very long time ago.

Anyway, today I am going to speak about the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This bill is titled the 'energy safety bill', but when you examine its contents it becomes clear that the bill does not improve safety at all, it compromises it. The government claims that it is streamlining governance, that it is improving efficiency and that it is enhancing enforcement. What it is really doing is centralising power, which you actually spoke about, saying that is what we are apparently trying to do – pot, kettle, black. How about you look in a mirror? That is what you are trying to do: centralise power, reduce accountability and cut out the community and expert voices at a time when our state is facing escalating fire danger and increased energy instability.

This bill amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005. It expands the powers of authorised officers, allowing them to enter private property without consent if they deem there is a risk. It abolishes independent advisory committees like the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee. It does not surprise me that you are getting rid of them; I do not think you should. It reduces Energy Safe Victoria's corporate plan reporting from annually to once every three years. Mr Davis spoke about how it is like getting you to correct your own homework. What you are really doing is just cutting the work down for yourself. You do not want to consult different people. You are cutting out expert advice, and you are making Victoria less safe in the process. What Labor is doing once again is tightening that stranglehold that it has on Victorians.

Let us remind ourselves: Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone regions in the world. Black Saturday in 2009 claimed 173 lives. During Black Summer, in 2019 to 2020, 1.5 million hectares burnt and billions of animals were killed. This year bushfires in Victoria's west burnt 65,000 hectares in a single day. Experts from repeated inquiries have repeatedly urged for a comprehensive approach, transparency, independent oversight, regular vegetation clearance and modern infrastructure upgrades, yet this bill does the opposite – not surprising. Once again Labor is doing what it wants to make itself look and feel better and ignoring expert advice, and Victorians will pay the price for that.

Let me read from Energy Victoria's electric and gas network safety review. It says fires can be caused by electric arcs igniting vegetation, equipment failure or hot molten metal particles from powerline contact. This is a serious issue – that is not speculation, it is fact – and it is one that you are just turning a blind eye to. On Black Saturday three major fires were started by aging electrical infrastructure. Despite knowing this, the government is pursuing massive expansions of high-risk energy assets through large-scale renewables: 10,000 kilometres of transmission lines and poles up to 85 metres tall. So it is not us, Mr McIntosh – through you, Acting President – who are ripping up farmland. It is not us. We are supporting farmers. We were out there with the hundreds and hundreds of farmers when you were just completely ignoring them. We were out standing shoulder to shoulder with them, because you are not doing the right thing by them. There are massive wind turbines and solar farms often built in ecologically sensitive areas and fire-prone areas. There are gigantic lithium ion battery sites, notorious for fire risk and nearly impossible to extinguish once ignited – and that does not include hydropower. All this is being fast-tracked through our landscapes –

*Members interjecting.*

**Renee HEATH:** They are a rowdy bunch, aren't they, over there. They are a rowdy bunch that often do not care about their regions, I think.

All of this has been done with minimal transparency and no independent oversight. Rural communities have been stonewalled. It was not just this morning on the steps that the government stonewalled people from rural communities, this has been happening over and over again. This government has continually trampled over property rights in projects such as the Gelliondale wind farm, which has received comprehensive complaints, many of them, and has been considered without proper planning processes being followed due to its reclassification as a significant economic development site. This is industrialisation on a huge scale.

So where are the environmental concerns now, when we are talking about these things? Native forests are being cleared at an alarming rate, koala habitats are being destroyed, birds are being destroyed or displaced, wildlife corridors are being fragmented and recovery zones are being erased – all of this from a government who shut down VicForests and the native timber industry, citing concerns for biodiversity and fire risk. Yet these large-scale renewable developments are clearing far more land and killing far more native species and have far less scrutiny.

*Members interjecting.*

**Renee HEATH:** What a shame. I am so sorry. It is lovely to see you in here, Ms Shing. These technologies are not renewable in any literal sense. The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates 78 million tonnes of solar waste by 2050. That is a lot. According to *Harvard Business Review*, by 2035 solar waste will outweigh new installations by 2.5 times. Lithium batteries are another fire hazard. One US recycling operator put it like this:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

There is nothing you can do to put out a lithium ion battery fire. It has to extinguish itself by consuming all available flammable material.

This is a huge risk in our state.

We are supporting our CFA. We are supporting our rural communities. The Labor Party certainly are not.

**A member** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** They do hate the CFA. They have destroyed the CFA. Not only that, they ignore them. There were hundreds of CFA volunteers out on the steps this morning, and they were given nothing but the cold shoulder by this government. You really have to face up to the fact that you have closed the native timber industry. The people that would be first on site when it came to fires, that would clear the paths, that would go and make sure that there was a reduced fuel load – you shut them down with no plan of what to do next. Imagine a scenario during summer in rural Victoria surrounded by the fuel that we have now with the plan that these guys have got.

At the same time the government has undermined the very strategies proven to reduce fire risk, including vegetation clearances around powerlines, regular back-burning, which is known to reduce fires by 95 per cent – all of these things have been neglected – and sustainable low-impact clearing methods; there are lots of different ones that you have completely turned a blind eye to. And of course there is the closure of the native timber industry, which has removed a huge safety net that we have relied on. We have lost experienced bush workers, many of whom play a vital role when it comes to bushfire prevention. We have seen the rise of the detection-and-suppression approach, which sounds modern but is absolutely reckless. We let fuel loads build up and pretend that we can douse them from the sky. This is absolutely terrible policy; it is lazy policy, and it is out of touch.

In my last 14 seconds I will say this: I am glad that we are –

*Members interjecting.*

**Renee HEATH:** You can move to extend my time if you would like. But I am glad that we are opposing these bills. I am proud to stand with the people of Victoria by opposing Labor's latest bills.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:36): Well, that speech was certainly about as underwhelming as the Liberal Party's election results last weekend. I was not quite sure where it was going at different points there. It did not really quite get any sort of plan fleshed out. You would think, having spent so long in opposition in this state, that they would have some sort of concept of a plan, some sort of vague idea of what they would want to actually do for the Victorian people, as opposed to just the usual talking about themselves and talking about us and how horrible we are.

We do have two bills today in cognate to be debated: we have the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 as well. With the often freewheeling nature of this place it is customary of course for many of our speakers on both sides to respond to the various points and the ideas put forward by members opposite, but I do not really have a great deal to go off, to be honest, based on that previous contribution. I did not get any sort of real sense of policy or, as I said, any sort of idea for strategy. What we did hear was a rambling and incoherent discussion, if I did not mishear, quite favourably discussing countries – and frankly it is outrageous. A communist dictatorship in Asia and a fascist dictatorship in Europe were apparently being held up as examples of having cheap power prices.

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Galea is really misrepresenting me, and I would ask him not to verbal me, please.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** On the point of order, I was not here for the earlier contributions, and my understanding is a bit here and there. Let us try and keep this roughly on the path. To be frank, I was not 100 per cent listening to Mr Galea when whatever was said was said. So I will just give a reminder: no reflecting on people, no misrepresenting people, and play on.

**Michael GALEA:** No offence taken, I think. I will rephrase my comments then to say it would be an outrageous folly to seek to compare Victoria unfavourably to communist and fascist dictatorships overseas, and I am sure that that was not what the member opposite intended to do.

We do know that we have a very, very strong renewable energy sector here in Victoria. We are already seeing those results, and those results are coming through programs such as the Victorian energy upgrades program, otherwise known as the VEU. Indeed, as we know and as members opposite have conspicuously forgotten about or failed to mention, Victoria does also have the cheapest power prices in the nation. That is not despite our investment in renewables; that is in large part driven by that investment. We know that the VEU is a fantastic program, and for the best part of two decades these energy upgrades have worked to lower emissions in this state. The Allan Labor government is planning for the future, protecting our environment and ensuring that the average Victorian spends less to switch on the lights, put the kettle on and turn the TV on, whether that is to watch a great Victorian-made show or whether it is perhaps – a week or so ago – to turn on the ABC or *Sky News* to see some very catastrophic election results for the Liberal Party.

One of the key reforms introduced by this bill will extend the VEU program to 2045, locking in the next 20 years of support that the VEU will provide to Victorians, which will also help to provide long-term certainty, to facilitate investment and innovation in the Victorian energy industry. The bill will also help to facilitate the continued delivery of the Allan Labor government's plan for the future of Victoria's energy market, the continued path towards net zero and the ongoing goal of delivering cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy to Victorian households and businesses.

This of course stands in complete contrast to the zealous fascination with the idea of nuclear energy that has so captured the hearts and minds of those opposite and indeed the new federal leadership team announced just this morning, Sussan Ley and Ted O'Brien – who is of course one of the chief proponents of the coalition's nuclear policy. I am not sure what they will do now. Of course as Mr McIntosh said, there were 20 different energy policies in nine years under the former federal Liberal government. Who knows how many they will have by the end of this year alone? But we do know that those members opposite supported their federal platform, which was a zealous campaign of nuclear energy, no matter the immense cost, no question as to the water demands that nuclear energy has in a country that is famous for its wildly differing levels of rainfall, no concept of where these plants were going to go and no plans for the cost that was going to be imposed on all Australian households and businesses to fund this ridiculous frolic. And of course, as far as we know, they still support it. We did not hear a rebuke from state colleagues. In fact we had Mr Davis and others openly cheerleading for it, probably unable to come to their costings yet again, as Mr Davis is wont to do – but again, a frolic of a nuclear vision which was so utterly and comprehensively rejected not just in Victoria but across the nation as well.

We also know that members opposite have opposed, repeatedly, measures in the VEU. They tried to abolish it when they were last in office, and they have repeatedly tried to undermine and trash the VEU in their long term in opposition here. They do not care about the money that Victorians have saved thanks to the VEU, nor do they care about the role that the program plays in delivering action on climate change that is so important.

Beyond extending the VEU to 2025, this bill will make a number of significant changes. The bill allows regulations to set targets in two-year tranches, rather than every five years, whilst the program undergoes its strategic review. This review is currently underway, and it will modernise and strengthen the program to ensure that it continues supporting Victorians in transitioning away from gas, for example, and lowering their energy costs in the process. It gives certainty to industry – certainty that, again, is just completely absent from those opposite. Mr McIntosh spoke about the sigh of relief in industry – again, not having to go through changing energy policy a few times every year, every few weeks in some cases, which those opposite want to do because they do not have a plan for Australia and they do not have a plan for Victoria. All they are invested in is the spoils of their ever-diminishing power. This certainty is so important, and as part of this bill we are providing industry and others with

the certainty that we are committed to getting this right. Once this review is completed we will set targets from the period of 2028 through to 2030, and then the five-year increments will resume until 2045. The bill also introduces new provisions to expand the Essential Services Commission's compliance and enforcement powers. This includes new improvement and prohibition notice powers, an additional civil penalty requirement, enforcement pathways and new mandated training requirements for scheme participants.

Reducing the up-front costs for energy consumers, though, throughout this transition is vital. Therefore the bill will amend the act to clarify the additionality requirement and explicitly allow for activities that may be mandated by another law or regulation to be prescribed under the VEU program in future. This indeed will allow consumers to continue to receive discounts for energy upgrades in their homes and in their businesses and facilitate the uptake of mandated activities if deemed necessary.

The bill also introduces flexibility and reduces pressure on energy retailers by removing an existing restriction on the vintage of certificates that can be surrendered by energy retailers each year. It also allows for future VEU program discounts to be targeted to specific cohorts – for example, vulnerable and low-income customers – to enable greater access to this program as cost-of-living pressures continue to apply for lots of people. We know that Victoria is leading the country in delivering climate action and transitioning to renewable energy. We have legislated ambitious targets for renewable generation of 60 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035 and nation-leading storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035.

We know that when it comes to this program of delivery we are seeing those results come through, because when you have a government that has a clear vision, that has a clear pathway to achieving it, that is how you achieve results, not by constantly being at each other's throats because you still cannot decide what you want your energy policy to be. When you have that, you have uncertainty, you have risk for industry and you have costs, and that is what we continue to see from those opposite. Again, I can only infer what I presume to be implicit support for the federal Liberal Party's nuclear policy. With the new deputy leader of that party I can only presume that that will continue, but I do not know. To rely on what the Liberal Party's energy policy will be in a week, let alone a year, is a fool's errand indeed. Whilst they continue to squabble over on that side and whilst they continue to tear each other apart because they do not have an interest in what is actually best for Australia's future, they will continue to do that. But over on this side we will continue with our plan to drive Victoria towards a renewable energy future that continues to have the cheapest power prices in the nation, that provides certainty to industry and to other stakeholders and that provides far, far improved sustainability outcomes. Countries such as those referenced by Dr Heath might not be moving in that direction, but many countries are. In Asia and in Europe countries are moving towards renewable energy, and if we were to go backwards or to go on some ridiculous detour, such as nuclear energy, which would take decades and decades and decades to build – if you can afford it; if you are not then slugging bill payers with the cost of it – we would then be delaying action for 30-odd years on other forms of renewable energy that we can do cheaper, quicker and more efficiently now.

I would say the choice is clear, but we know that the Victorian people – indeed the Australian people – have spoken very recently. Indeed with energy and nuclear such an important part of the Liberal Party's strategy – apparently they did not want to talk about it quite so much towards the end, but that was their policy – they have sent a very clear signal on that ridiculous idea too, because we know, at the end of the day, it is not about nuclear energy, it is about a smokescreen. It is an excuse to delay whilst they continue to support their mates and continue polluting.

These two bills before us today –

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael GALEA:** I have got so much to talk about. I have got pages here, Mr Mulholland, I have not even got to yet. I have got some very exciting figures.

Perhaps you might like me to tell you how these policies have actually helped Victorians to save and to get better energy outcomes. We know that as of last year, Mr Mulholland, the renewable energy policies and programs that this government has overseen have helped Victorians to reach 5301 megawatts of commissioned large-scale wind and solar capacity that is being built in this state – renewables that are now producing more electricity per annum than any individual one of the three remaining coal-fired generators. We also have 4537 megawatts of small-scale rooftop solar PV capacity – rooftop solar has produced more than 8 per cent of Victoria's energy generation since 2023 – and indeed 537 megawatts of commissioned battery storage capacity, which is more than any other state.

We know that measures such as the VEU program have been critical to achieving our world-leading climate targets to reduce our emissions by 45 to 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and 75 to 80 per cent on 2005 levels by 2035, ultimately working towards net zero emissions by 2040, and with these stats we are well on our way to achieving these targets. We have more than tripled the share of renewable energy in this state since 2014, generating now around 39 per cent of this state's power from renewables, and all throughout those opposite have said, 'It can't be done, it can't be done, it can't be done.' Whilst they continue to squabble over there, we are getting on and we are doing it. I commend these two bills to the house.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:52): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. The Victorian government is committed to the safety of all Victorians, and we have proven this time and time again. This energy and land legislation amendment bill is no different. It is excellent to see bills coming through in the energy space, and they demonstrate how the Allan Labor government is doing what matters when it comes to energy policy and safety. This bill is another step towards the Victorian government's broader focus on delivering more sustainable and accountable energy systems for the Victorian community.

Energy network safety has long been a concern for the Victorian community and a high priority for successive Victorian governments, because safety must always be a priority in delivering essential services like energy. The provision of an essential service like energy cannot occur without appropriate regard to safety frameworks, because safety is essential to the proper delivery of energy and is crucial to safeguarding consumer protection and confidence. It is also a crucial part of building the community's acceptance and trust, which we need during this energy transition.

Power bills have been a big stress on family budgets as of late, influenced by both the cost-of-living crisis and inflation. The Allan Labor government has been doing an enormous amount of work in the world of energy legislation, programs and policies to help mitigate that pressure, along with other measures outside gas and electricity, in order to help everyday Victorians with the pressures of cost of living, the most well known of these of course being the power saving bonus, which was a tremendous success in my community of Southern Metro. That is why this bill is so important. The reforms it introduces will have long-term benefits for Victorians and ensure that confidence in our energy safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria, remains.

Victoria's energy safety framework consists of the following acts: the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005, and also regulations made under these acts. This framework supports safety in the energy sector, and it protects people and their property from risks associated with electricity and gas incidents, including bushfires. We have seen the devastating capacity for danger in these networks before. The Longford gas explosion in 1998 highlighted the impacts of a major incident disrupting gas supply to the state as well as the dangers that those working in the gas industry face. Electricity network safety concerns were cruelly emphasised by the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009; 173 lives were sadly lost that day, largely linked with fires initially sparked by faults in electricity lines running through extremely dry bushland. Both of these incidents were a critical motivator in developing relevant and responsive safety

frameworks for major hazard facilities and energy networks in Victoria and have continued to shape the importance of proactive safety measures in Victoria.

For example, the powerline bushfire safety program was established in 2011. The program has substantially reduced the risk of powerlines starting bushfires by upgrading Victoria's electricity distribution network with world-leading safety technologies, introducing legislative amendments to mandate them and addressing powerlines in the highest bushfire risk areas throughout regional and rural Victoria. The reality is we are certainly a fire-prone region in Victoria and indeed across the nation and across the world, and all governments' focus needs to be on mitigation. If this bill can go some way towards revising and improving mitigation plans, then it is undoubtedly a reasonable thing, because we want to ensure that such catastrophes are not repeated.

This highlights the government's dedication to undertaking complex work to make Victoria safer, but our work does not stop here. Victoria's energy sector continues to be significantly developed and transformed. We are seeing growth in renewable energy and storage. We are seeing the transition from a few large-scale facilities towards various distributed energy resources, and while these innovations are indicative of the strides in progress of our state, this also means gaps in the energy safety network have been exposed.

The current framework was designed for a centralised fossil fuel based network and has not kept up with the pace of evolving technologies as we move to a cleaner, greener Victoria. The changing nature of the energy landscape in this state is obvious, and it is crucial for new energy technologies to encompass, be as responsible and have the same level of accountability as traditional companies – those of generation from coal and gas.

The bill looks to improve community safety through effective targeted regulation to reduce those risks, as I have said. This is where legislative reform is important. Responding to contemporary energy safety risks requires providing Energy Safe Victoria with a variety of strong and flexible powers. Changes are required to respond to contemporary energy safety risks and to ensure that our great state maintains an internationally leading network safety system, because this is a government that cares about our communities, about our environment and about our future, and we will keep working hard to ensure that this continues.

Energy Safe is a statutory body established by the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005. Their role is to ensure Victorian gas and electricity industries are safe and meet community expectations. They prevent harm by monitoring and enforcing compliance with Victoria's Energy Safe legislative structure. This enables both the promotion and the enforcement of compliance with the regulatory framework. It is imperative to improve community safety through more effective and targeted regulations of new and emerging energy safety risks, including those posed by new and emerging technologies. Of course as a proactive government, unlike those on the other side of the chamber, we recognise that this transition period requires a reliable and safe supply of energy to Victorians, because energy is not just a commodity, it is also an essential service. It powers our homes, our industry and all of our lives. Therefore the government has the responsibility to ensure that it puts in place a robust regulatory framework so that every Victorian can trust that energy is safe, reliable and sustainable, because that is what this government is about – we ensure that our legislation is up to date. This bill is all about strengthening our position at the forefront of this critical transition. We are keeping pace with emerging technologies to protect the workers' and the community's safety.

The bill will amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997, the Pipelines Act 2005 and the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005. These amendments will strengthen Energy Safe's suite of regulatory tools. This bill will do so by introducing increased capacity for Energy Safe to mitigate safety issues early, monitor compliance with directions and take enforcement actions. It removes the need for Energy Safe authorised officers to obtain written consent before exercising certain powers, particularly when there is a risk to the health and safety of a person or significant damage to property.

We saw the serious fires in 2021 at the Victorian Big Battery and the Cohuna solar farm, and we know that the limitations imposed on Energy Safe Victoria meant it was unable to intervene until it was too late. That was not acceptable, and these amendments recognise that. This will enable authorised officers to act swiftly to resolve safety risks involving new technologies requiring specialist knowledge. The bill provides extra flexibility for Energy Safe to appropriately and efficiently respond to minor offences. This will mean they will have the capacity to issue on-the-spot infringements for offences against the Electricity Safety Act and the Gas Safety Act.

New powers for the courts will also be introduced by the bill, enabling them to issue injunctions and adverse publicity notices, strengthening the deterrent effect of penalties, whether that be through introducing reputational risk for noncompliance or improving public awareness about energy safety issues. Energy Safe will be granted new powers to suspend electrical contractor registrations or worker licences where it is within the public interest to do so and, further, issue prohibition notices to prevent certain activities and risks to the safe supply or use of electricity. Importantly, Energy Safe's powers to issue improvement notices will provide a more proactive approach. This will ensure compliance with the Electricity Safety Act and regulations and a readiness to address risks in advance.

Various penalties under the Electricity Safety Act and Gas Safety Act will be increased with the bill. This serves as a strong deterrent to the potentially dangerous or damaging consequences for noncompliance. Not only does it reflect the seriousness of the offences, but it also brings the penalties in line with other offences in similar legislative frameworks. The true severity of noncompliance with energy regulation law is not something we take lightly, and let that serve as a warning to any industry bodies that might consider breaking the law or attempt to disregard any regulation that serious measures are in place. The regulatory body will fine you and will prosecute you, plain and simple. It is high time that we recognise the true severity of violating electricity and gas regulations and their obligations. The primary goal here is to promote consumer safety, to protect building occupants at risk from unsafe electrical gas-fitting work and to prevent anything that could lead to serious injury, illness or even death, because our system must be protected against any and all risks that could potentially lead to harm for our consumers in this great state.

Other minor and technical amendments will be enforced by the bill to improve Energy Safe's operational efficiency and effectiveness. This will include changing terminology, aligning regulations and processes with subordinate legislation or act requirements and also removing the duplicated duty. The bill will also require a corporate plan submission from Energy Safe every three years as well as the usual annual update. This in turn will mean the development of more forward-focused strategic plans.

The bill also seeks to provide increased certainty of public land tenure and proponents undertaking environment effects statements – processes that are subject to the Environment Effects Act 1978. Currently the Land Act has restrictions on the minister entering into an agreement to lease with a project proponent under section 134(1A) while the EES process is underway. Consequently, proponents of the major infrastructure projects can be without certainty or tenure for long periods of time while an EES is being completed. This is crucial, as projected proponents may not be willing to continue investing in a project without some security of tenure. This can impede the progress of a project where land tenure is needed to further inform investment in EES processes. These projects, while not overly common, are often strategically important for Victoria. Amending this act will therefore remove doubt and allow the minister administering section 134 of the Land Act 1958 to enter into an agreement to lease over unreserved Crown land whilst a related EES process is underway. This change seeks to support further investment in EES processes and future project needs. This is a win for future infrastructure and a win for Victoria.

It is worth noting that various key unions, industry and government stakeholders supported the proposed reforms when consulted during development of the bill. This included Victoria Police and the relevant departments, such as the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Education, the

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Department of Health and the Department of Transport and Planning. The Solicitor-General provided advice in relation to the environmental effects of the Land Act, which helped to inform the development of the proposed amendments to it, and projected proponents who currently are affected by the operation of the Land Act and the environmental acts as they currently stand were consulted on the development of the Land Act amendments. Clearly community safety is the highest priority in this government, and the introduction of this bill shows that we are unwavering in our commitment to the safety of Victorians.

I have absolute confidence in Minister D'Ambrosio as the state's Minister for Energy and Resources, and I commend her for her ongoing commitment to not only transforming our energy system but also ensuring we lead the way with reliable safety frameworks in place when we need them. It is this leadership that has seen new technologies emerge and new technologies succeed. There can be no doubt that this government is committed to ensuring that Victorians have the best possible delivery of essential products like electricity and gas. We are focused on creating a livable, inclusive and sustainable Victoria, one where the community is at the centre of everything we do. Victorians know it too, because they voted for Labor and for a Labor government that makes clear commitments. They have voted for us a number of times now, so it is clear that Victorians know the difference between a government that is committed to doing something about our future and the stark contrast with those opposite.

These amendments will ensure that our system is protected against many risks that could potentially lead to harm of our energy consumers in this great state. It will protect the ongoing market and it will protect the transition to renewables, and it is vital to safeguarding consumer protection and confidence by ensuring the safe delivery and regulation of these new technologies. These reforms are a clear reflection of the government's election commitment to ensuring regulatory settings keep pace with emerging technologies and to protecting our workers' and communities' safety. By strengthening Energy Safe's suite of regulatory and enforcement tools, we will do this. This is a sensible bill, an intelligent bill and a bill that will protect Victoria from future reliability risks on the energy market and assist with the smooth transition into a more future-ready Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:06): I also rise to say a few words on the two bills that we are debating today simultaneously in cognate debate. I will start with the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. Firstly, I would like to thank the government's advisers for their assistance with our many questions on both of these bills. I did have many concerns about some of the issues around powers of entry and this sort of thing in this bill. I believe that most of my concerns are acquitted there, but I will have a few questions in committee on that bill and we will get to that.

The other bill is the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 on the energy upgrades scheme. I have had lots to say about this scheme in the past, and it has been spoken about by many other members, around waste and roting and corruption and ineffective technologies and all sorts of things that have happened with this scheme. The fridges were brought up by the opposition. I think that even the government would concede that there have been, historically, many problems with this scheme. To the government's credit, I think that many of the problems will actually be fixed by this bill; they are attempting to fix some of these things. On that note, I actually do not understand why the opposition are opposing this bill, because they seem to support the idea of having an energy upgrades scheme, they just do not appear to think that it is being run very well.

The Libertarian Party has a much more fundamental opposition to this, and whether or not it is run well, we do not believe that the government should be interfering in this space. Effectively what happens with this scheme is people's power bills are effectively increased by these certificates, as the retailer has to go out and pay for things that end up in efficiency upgrades. These are things like upgraded appliances, heat pumps, better air conditioners and these sorts of things. It is our belief in the Libertarian Party that the market should be as free as possible and, if a particular appliance by a

manufacturer increases the efficiency, that efficiency should be paid for by the consumer, not by everyone else who happens to be not consuming that. I know that there is an argument that if someone is not a renter and they are a property owner, they have got the money to spend on this and they get the discount effectively through this scheme. The argument is that a renter who cannot invest in that sort of thing to increase their efficiency gets some benefit because of overall lower demand on the system and therefore they get some sort of benefit.

But I would argue that they are still paying for that through their electricity bills, and I would rather they had the choice of what to do with their money than the government making that choice for them or indeed the energy retailers making that choice for them. So we do not think that it should be interfered with at all. We think that the market should be as free as possible and if there are great new technologies then companies can market those technologies and sell them to people and people can gain the benefits of those technologies.

I do have concerns about access to certification under this scheme. It is always a magnet for governments picking winners and losers, as we have seen in the past. They get lobbied by different manufacturers, and they may or may not agree to incorporate them into schemes. That can cause governments to pick winners and losers in technology, and inevitably governments are not very good at picking winners and losers in technology. As has been pointed out, many of these technologies turned out to be duds. One that I personally experienced and I think many Victorians experienced is when the government rolled out many years ago the compact fluorescent globes. They would get someone turn up to their door and give them a whole bunch of free stuff, and of course people took it because it was free. It was not really free; it was paid by everyone who had a power bill. But very soon after that LEDs became more popular and more efficient and more affordable, actually, and people would voluntarily choose to go and buy them from a retailer and replace their globes and they would gain the benefits of that. What I do think is that the government should be encouraging more competition for these technologies, encouraging lower prices as much as possible. But interfering in the market like this – I am sceptical as to the benefits, and therefore the Libertarian Party will be opposing this bill. Again I state that we oppose it not because we think that this bill will not improve the scheme; we oppose it because we oppose the scheme fundamentally, and extending it to 2045 is a bad idea in our view.

We also do not agree with emissions reduction targets. I have said many times I do not think that Victoria setting emissions reduction targets is going to change planetary weather systems by any measurable amount whatsoever. Therefore we are imposing costs on Victorians for no measurable benefit globally, and I think that is wrong. I think that we need to focus on Victoria and Australia first and worry about what other countries think secondarily. The major countries that are causing these emissions are backing away from this. The United States, China, India – if people care about emissions, they are the countries they should be focusing on, not Australia, which in the scheme of things is nothing more than a rounding error. I hear the Greens talk all the time about how we need to cut emissions so that we are going to change the weather. That is not going to happen. It does not matter what Victoria does; we are not going to change the weather by ourselves. We are largely at the whims of much larger countries with much larger populations and much larger economies that have much larger emissions than we do, and that is where the main game is. If you care about emissions, that is where you should be looking: foreign countries.

Again we have had nuclear brought up in this debate. I know that Labor loves bringing it up to tease the Liberal Party about, and I always get upset when they ignore the fact that we have supported the legalisation of nuclear energy for 24 years now in the Libertarian Party. I would say this: Australia does do one really good thing in the nuclear space in that we export large amounts of uranium, which generates large amounts of carbon-free energy all around the world. Last time I checked, the amount of electricity generated with Australian uranium is approximately equivalent to 80 per cent of Australia's total electricity production. So in many ways we are already doing very, very much globally to try and have different energy sources out there, including nuclear. In fact there was much

surprise from many Victorians and even from the government recently when it was reported that the United States was using uranium from Victoria, of all places, to power some of its nuclear reactors.

Because we have the nuclear prohibition in Victoria, companies do not want to process mineral sands for elements like neodymium and praseodymium. And what people do not realise is that those rare-earth metals, which we are lucky in Victoria to have a lot of, are also in situ in the ground with other elements which have low radioactivity, like uranium, like thorium, and we cannot process them in Victoria because no-one wants to do that when we have a nuclear activities ban. So we just send them off to South Australia, we send them off to China or we send them off to the United States. The United States quite sensibly said, 'Well, we're going to get the neodymium out to make these strong magnets' – to build wind turbines and electric cars and all this other stuff that they do with neodymium – 'but we're not going to waste the uranium, we're going to process that as well,' and they use it in nuclear reactors. So Victorians can stand proud that some of the uranium produced in Victoria is producing nuclear energy in the United States.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:16): I am pleased to rise to speak in the cognate debate on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 and the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. It is always a pleasure to get up in this house and talk about energy policy, particularly given the government have a very, very clear policy that we support a renewable future for Victoria. We believe that investing in renewable energy is going to reduce the amount of carbon that pollutes our atmosphere from our electricity and energy generation, and we believe that a renewable future is cheaper for Victorians and for Victorian households. They are two fundamental reasons, two of the best reasons, why renewable energy is the future of energy in this state and why this Labor government has been and will continue to be a fervent supporter, a solid supporter, of a net zero future, of a renewable future, for Victoria.

We were also really glad to see that on Saturday week just past the community here in Victoria and across the nation endorsed a federal government that shares Victoria's vision for an energy sector built on a renewable future and that wants this nation as well as this state to be a renewable energy superpower that harnesses the great natural gifts that we have been given in this country, whether they be wind or whether they be solar, to produce cleaner energy and to produce cheaper energy. The Australian people, particularly on the Saturday before last, made a very clear statement that they prefer Labor's approach to renewables to the Liberals' approach to nuclear power. We know that the journey to a renewable future, to renewable energy in this state and this nation, is leading to cleaner power and is leading to cheaper power. That stands in stark contrast to the agenda that the federal Liberal Party, the federal National Party, the state Liberal Party and the state National Party have been pushing for a very long time, and that is to reopen the nuclear question – to start our consumers, our energy users, our households here in Victoria down a path that is going to lead to more expensive power in the form of nuclear energy and is going to lead to more dangerous and more costly power in the nature of nuclear energy.

We have had debates on those questions here in this chamber before. I hope that the resounding rejection of nuclear energy that we saw in the recent federal election from the people of Australia puts those debates to bed, because I think the people of Australia have spoken, and certainly they have said that they do not believe that nuclear energy has any place in Victoria's or Australia's future energies mix. In that light we have got to ensure that there is an energy future for this state that is going to be with us after our ageing coal-fired power stations reach the end of their life. We cannot hope away the reality that our coal-fired generators here in this state are reaching the end of their economic life. They are becoming increasingly unreliable. They are becoming increasingly costly to run and to fix.

What the government here, under the leadership of Minister for Energy and Resources Ms D'Ambrosio, has set us on a course for and is delivering for is a future that ensures, as our coal-fired generation phases down in terms of the share of energy it is capable of producing for this state, as it reaches the end of its economic life, that we have got the energy mix in place to ensure that Victoria has the energy future we need. Part of the comprehensive suite of measures that the energy

minister has been championing in her efforts – a tireless champion for a Victorian energy future that is reliable, cleaner and cheaper – is to make sure that we have got all parts of the system working together in the same direction to achieve that end goal, our legislated end goal of a net zero target by 2045.

A key part of achieving that target is not just on the generation side, though that is important – such as making sure we have got the transmission lines to bring the new power that is being generated in certain parts of the state to the homes and communities who are going to need that power. Not only is it about investing in new forms of generation and new forms of storage, the big batteries and the significant investments that we are making in things like offshore wind, a key part of that target is ensuring that the consumption that we do of energy in this state is complementing that shift to renewable generation in particular – that the electrification of our homes is enabling us to take advantage of the cheaper and cleaner renewable energy that the state is generating in our households.

The Victorian energy upgrades program is a key part of that electrification agenda, and it has helped provide more than 2.4 million households and businesses in Victoria with discounted energy products and services. Since the Victorian energy upgrades program went electric in 2023 it has delivered rebates for more than 19,000 reverse-cycle air conditioners and 39,000 hot-water systems, saving 28 million tonnes of emissions. Under the scheme, households that replace a gas ducted heating system with an electric one can receive a discount of up to \$3,600. So not only does the VEU, the Victorian energy upgrades program, save on emissions, it helps deliver that cheaper and that cleaner renewable energy into people's homes through electric appliances.

It also helps households reduce their energy bills. The households that receive up to \$3,600 to replace a gas ducted heating system with an electric one can also save around \$600 every year in their energy bills. So the program is delivering up-front savings in terms of a rebate to help with costs of replacement of old, particularly gas-powered ducted heating systems, for example, with modern electric heat pumps, but the benefits of that are just not in the up-front rebate. It is the ongoing savings that people receive – in this case, with this gas ducted heating system, of around \$600 a year. An electric heat pump hot-water system can save households \$250 per year compared with a gas unit. For businesses the average saving on energy bills as a result of the Victorian energy upgrades program is around \$3,700 annually.

I have been out and seen this firsthand with members of our community. I have spoken in this place previously about the visit I made with Minister D'Ambrosio to a couple in Hampton who, as part of the Victorian energy upgrades program, replaced their old gas ducted heating system with an electric heat pump. We visited Bob and Pat in their little villa home in Hampton. They were effusive in their praise for the benefits of the electrification that they had already undertaken in their home in terms of the electrification of their cooktop to a new induction system but also the ease of the installation, the ease of the procurement and the expected gains from the new electric heat pump and better insulated ducted system being installed by a local Victorian company headquartered in Clayton South that is employing workers, employing tradies, to do these sorts of installations right across metropolitan Melbourne.

As a result of the work that is being done across our energy sector we have in Victoria retail power prices that are some of the lowest in the country, and they are projected to keep falling into the future. Renewables have had and will have a big part to play in ensuring that Victorians are paying less for their energy. Our net zero target of 2045 we are well on our way to achieving. We surpassed our 2020 emissions target of a 15 to 20 per cent reduction in emissions; we achieved a 30 per cent reduction. We were already in range of our next target, which was 28 to 33 per cent by 2025, with a 31 per cent reduction by 2022.

Victoria is decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, with one of the earliest legislated net zero dates in the world. We are achieving our goals. We are decarbonising faster than anyone. We are putting more renewables into the system. It is delivering savings for Victorian households. But we can

always do better and we can always do more. That is why we are doing this two-year strategic review of the Victorian energy upgrades program. What this bill does is allow regulations to set targets in two-year tranches rather than every five years while the program undergoes its strategic review – the review that is underway and will modernise and strengthen the program to make sure that it continues to support Victorians to make the transition away from fossil-based fuels to renewables to lower their energy costs.

The changes also give certainty to industry that we are committed to getting this right and that once the review is completed we will set targets from 2028 to 2030 and then resume in five-year increments until 2045. The bill also strengthens the regulatory framework as the program continues to provide a wider and more flexible range of compliance and enforcement tools for the Essential Services Commission, who are the regulators of the program. We do have an expectation that the products that Victorians are installing in their homes through this program are of the utmost standard, backed up by proper compliance and enforcement activities – and that is critical.

The changes in the bill will also include new improvement and prohibition notice powers, an additional civil penalty requirement and enforcement pathways as well as mandate training requirements for scheme participants. We are further adapting the bill to ensure that it fulfils its requirements and improves accessibility to the program for both businesses and consumers and it introduces flexibility and reduces pressure on energy retailers by removing existing restrictions on the vintage certificates that can be surrendered by the retailers each year, bringing the program in line with similar programs interstate, such as in New South Wales, which is expected to enable more efficient trading of certificates and reduce the costs of the program, which will ultimately be reflected in energy bills.

The other piece of legislation that we are debating today, the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, will amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to introduce a new power of entry for Energy Safe Victoria officers to be able to enter premises with a magistrate-issued warrant to allow officers to investigate safety risks, monitor compliance and take enforcement actions with safeguards, ensuring proper oversight. Current powers do not allow inspectors to enter residential premises without the occupier's consent, even in circumstances that may pose a risk to public safety. The bill will expand the tools available to Energy Safe Victoria and the courts to enforce compliance, including the powers to stop unsafe work and to suspend electrical contractor registration or electrical worker licences where it is in the public interest to do so.

The bill will create a range of maximum penalties to better reflect the gravity of relevant safety risks and to increase deterrence, given the potential consequences of noncompliance. It also amends timeframes for specified operators to submit bushfire mitigation plans from annually to up to every five years – unless circumstances change, requiring a revised plan to be submitted sooner – relieving the administrative burden.

It amends the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 to establish a three-year corporate planning cycle rather than an annual cycle, which while maintaining accountability through annual reporting updates, seeks to make a range of changes to reduce administrative burdens by abolishing a range of committees and introducing sunset periods on a range of registers and changing the sunset period on a range of other matters.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Mr Mulholland does not appear to be interested in the content of the bill. He would prefer me to get back to talking about how the Victorian government is making energy cheaper and more renewable for Victorian households. I am happy to do that. Fundamentally, the Liberal Party seems disinterested in cleaner energy; it certainly is disinterested in cheaper energy for all Victorians. But I commend these bills to the house.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:31): I am delighted to speak on the first two bills together since the period of recess, I suppose you would call it – it was not really a break – the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. The energy safety bill upgrades our legislative framework around energy safety and strengthens the Victorian energy upgrades program. We have worked with Energy Safe Victoria and other stakeholders to review the regulatory regime around energy safety, and we have committed to making sure that it is still fit for purpose. The key objective to this is to keep Victorians safe, and we need a regime that can respond to the rapid rate of change as technology develops and our transition to renewables continues.

The second bill, the energy upgrades for the future bill, will make amendments to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. The energy upgrades for the future bill will strengthen the Victorian energy upgrades program, the VEU program, to ensure that it can continue to effectively support the energy transition. These amendments are critical to our future energy security. They will extend the VEU program's legislated end date until 2045, introduce new provisions to expand the Essential Services Commission's compliance and enforcement powers and explain how the current power to prescribe activities will operate concerning the additionality requirement, and this clarification is needed to ensure the VEU program can offer discounts in future situations where an action is mandated by another regulation or law. It will remove an existing restriction relating to the eligibility of vintage or certificates that can be surrendered by energy retailers each year, and importantly, it will allow for VEU program discounts to be better targeted specifically to a class of energy consumers such as vulnerable low-income consumers to enable greater accessibility to the VEU program. And finally, the amendments will introduce new mandatory training requirements for scheme participants. These reforms are essential for the VEU program to facilitate the energy transition.

Simultaneously, a broader strategic review is being conducted to modernise the scheme. This will enhance its support for electrification and ensure the Essential Services Commission, the program's regulator, can effectively manage it, minimise noncompliance and enforce regulations when needed. So, what has changed? What has changed in recent times is the transition to renewable energy is changing the way we generate and deliver energy. Victorians are now much more likely to generate and store their own energy in their own homes. In fact there is a phrase called 'prosumer' – producer and consumer. Thanks to the incentives provided by the Allan Labor government, more than 300,000 solar panels have been installed on Victorian rooftops, so there are a large number of Victorians that are both consumers of energy and producers of energy. That is more than 2100 megawatts of solar power, the equivalent of the Loy Yang A coal-fired power station, and that is not to be underestimated. Today 30 per cent of Victorian homes have solar installed. Each of these households are now saving an average of around \$1000 on energy bills each year. And with the Albanese federal government's home battery rebate plan, more Victorians will also be storing their own energy at home.

It is not just at the home level that things have changed. Our priority is to drive investment into Victoria's energy, resources and infrastructure sectors, employing Victorians for decades to come, and driving not just jobs but driving the renewal and the changes. This government have met every single emissions reduction and renewable energy target that we have set. I will repeat that: we have met every target we have set in relation to emissions reduction and renewable energy. We are on track to achieve 40 per cent renewable energy by 2025. We are building energy storage, like the Victorian Big Battery, to provide reliable renewable energy. We are supporting the development of offshore wind energy. And when I say we are supporting that development, we are making the regulatory changes that enable these changes to happen for that energy offshore to be traversing Victorian waters, public land, Crown land and occasionally private land, and for the regulatory boundaries and rules to be set in relation to that.

I must say I am thrilled at the result of the federal election on 3 May, because as my colleague Mr McIntosh said, there was definitely an enormous sigh of relief on Saturday the 3rd in the evening,

I am sure, in our region, with policy certainty now for the energy strategy going forward. If we had had a conservative result, we would have ended up with another complete flipping to another strategy and years of delay. So far we have had three years of investment into a national renewable energy transition. Obviously Victoria, as compared to some states, is ahead of the game, but we are very ready for the federal government to be playing their role in supporting renewable energy into the future, and so I was very, very excited. I do know that places like the Port of Portland, who are currently negotiating a range of different innovative renewable energy projects and have investors and users, will be absolutely thrilled that we are not flip-flopping to nuclear energy or any other crazy idea that may come from the federal opposition, which is where they should stay.

We are supporting the development of offshore wind energy, but at the same time we are respecting communities' views, community input and First Nations people's views as well. We are improving the planning and approval processes to deliver the projects we need while managing the impacts on our communities, the environment and First Nations people. We are determined to show respect and provide accurate information about our rules and the way things are going ahead to all of our communities and not to allow communities to be misled. We have brought back the SEC to directly invest in renewable energy generation and storage projects. So we are not just relying on private sector investment. We know, just like we had a transition to a fossil fuel energy grid perhaps 75 years ago, we are now going to be transitioning to a renewable grid. We do not want the power to be going off and we do not want energy inequality to happen.

When I say energy inequality, I am talking about isolated and rural communities losing their power and certain businesses and industries having insecure energy supply. That is why we are managing this transition very, very tightly and in a logical way, a pragmatic way, and I absolutely congratulate the Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio for the way that she is moving forward on this very, very complex transition.

Since 2014, 59 projects providing 4471 megawatts of new capacity have come online, and there are nine projects currently under construction which will provide a further 1314 megawatts of capacity. These include the SEC project at Plumpton, one of the largest battery energy storage projects in the world. It will provide enough power for 200,000 homes.

This bill will also strengthen enforcement powers. The bill introduces a new magistrate-issued warrant that will give Energy Safe Victoria officers authority to enter premises. Currently inspectors cannot enter residential premises without the occupier's consent, even when there is a potential risk to public safety. For example, Energy Safe became aware of a do-it-yourself home battery installation at a residential property that posed an electrocution and fire safety risk. Fortunately, the occupant gave consent to inspect. They found an extensive array of batteries had been installed down the side of the house with very limited access and clearly exposed wires and connections. Without the owner's consent there may have been a very serious incident.

The bill will also confer powers to stop unsafe work and to suspend registrations or licences of providers of electrical services, and it amends the types of types and severity of penalties to better fit the circumstances. It increases maximum penalties for serious offences to deter people from cutting corners and risking safety, and it introduces additional penalties that can be imposed via infringement notices. These can be issued on the spot for relatively minor offences.

One of the ways that risk is managed is through two committees, the Electrical Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee – that is a bit hard to say, isn't it. The bill abolishes these committees – and I heartily endorse that based on pronunciation difficulty alone – as Energy Safe Victoria is better able to perform their functions and, might I say, better named. In a fast-moving landscape, standing committees are too slow and process-heavy to be effective.

In concluding, I want to say that the world is changing at quite a fast pace. The invention of new ways of doing things, new ways of creating energy into people's homes and new technologies to do old

things means that there is enormous opportunity for communities to save money and to save the planet at the same time. But there is also the risk of perhaps ill-informed or ill-qualified people unintentionally – usually it is unintentional – doing something that is dangerous without even knowing. That is part of the reason why we need to play a role and regulate, particularly in the emerging space where there is not common knowledge about some of these changes. Both of these bills are another step in the journey of our transition, and I well and truly support both the bills and recommend them to the house.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (16:45): I rise to speak in support of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. The Allan Labor government is unapologetic about our energy safety regime. Victoria's robust energy safety framework is proactively updated to ensure that we continue to keep both workers and the community safe. Many of these reforms are aimed at relieving administrative burden and red tape from Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) so it can direct resources to where they are most needed, and our government is committed to helping Victorian families and businesses continue to slash their energy bills, and this bill will help the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program continue to do just that.

The energy safety bill will amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to introduce a new entry power for Energy Safe officers and will enable them to enter premises with a magistrate-issued warrant. This allows officers to investigate safety risks, monitor compliance and take enforcement action, with safeguards ensuring proper oversight. Current powers do not allow inspectors to enter a residential premises without the occupier's consent, even in situations where those circumstances pose a risk to public safety. The bill will expand the tools available to Energy Safe and the courts to enforce compliance, and these include powers to stop unsafe work and to suspend an electrical contractor's registration or electrical worker licence when it is in the public interest to do so. The bill will increase the range of maximum penalties to better reflect the gravity of relevant safety risks and to increase deterrents, given the potential consequences of non-compliance.

It also amends timeframes for specified operators to submit bushfire mitigation plans from annually up to every five years in line with major electricity companies, and it amends the Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005 to establish a three-year corporate planning cycle rather than an annual one, while maintaining accountability through annual report updates. It will reduce the administrative burden on ESV by abolishing the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee, allowing them to consult more flexibly. It also clarifies that the Minister for Environment can sign a contract to lease unreserved Crown land on agreed terms, subject to conditions, while an environment effects statement is ongoing, and this change reduces barriers to large-scale energy resources and infrastructure investment in Victoria.

The government is introducing a house amendment to the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, including additional amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to repeal the Essential Services Commission's role in determining minimum feed-in tariffs, or FIT rates, from 1 July 2025 onwards, providing greater flexibility for electricity retailers to set their own FIT rates for amounts to be credited to their customers for their solar exports. The huge uptake of solar in Victoria has helped push daytime wholesale prices to historic lows, and this means lower power bills for everyone but also means that the minimum feed-in tariff is no longer required.

Can I ask that the house amendment now be circulated, which I note is pursuant to the instruction motion on the notice paper.

**Amendment circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**Ingrid STITT:** The energy upgrades bill will amend the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007, the VEET act, to support the scale-up of electrification under the Victorian energy upgrades program and strengthen consumer protection. The bill extends the VEU program to 2045; critically this ensures that the VEU program will be here to support Victorians for the long term while providing long-term certainty to facilitate investment and innovation in the Victorian energy efficiency industry. It also aligns the program with Victoria's legislated net zero target of 2045. The bill will achieve this by extending the regulation-making power to set targets which determine the ambition for the program and the obligation on energy retailers to not fall short of their certificate-surrender obligations beyond 2030.

The bill allows regulations to set targets in two-year tranches rather than every five years while the program undergoes its strategic review. This review is currently underway and will modernise and strengthen the program to ensure it continues to support Victorians make the transition away from gas and lower their energy costs. The target setting will go back to five-year tranches once we hit 2030 and any review outcomes have taken effect. It is common sense and responsible governance to reduce the target tranches while the review is being undertaken. It gives certainty to industry that we are committed to getting this right and that once the review is completed we will set targets from 2028 to 2030 and then resume five-year increments until 2045. The opposition, I note, have said that we are changing legislation to get around the review, which just demonstrates that they really do not have any idea how the scheme runs and how to give industry certainty. I would pose the question to those opposite: why on earth would we set targets for five years when undertaking a two-year review? It pre-empts outcomes, and that is not what a responsible government does.

We also know how important it is that Victorians have confidence in the program and the products installed through the program, ensuring the highest standards backed up by proper compliance and enforcement activities, and that is absolutely a critical feature of the scheme. That is why the bill introduces new provisions to expand the Essential Services Commission's compliance and enforcement powers, and this includes new improvement and prohibition notice powers, additional civil penalty requirements and enforcement pathways as well as new mandated training requirements for scheme participants. Reducing the up-front costs for energy consumers throughout this transition is vital, therefore the bill will amend the act to clarify the additionality requirement and explicitly allow for activities that may be mandated by another law or regulation to be prescribed under the VEU program in the future. This will allow consumers to continue receiving discounts for energy upgrades in their homes and businesses and facilitate the uptake of mandated activities if deemed necessary.

The bill introduces flexibility and reduces pressure on energy retailers by removing an existing restriction on the vintage of certificates that can be surrendered by energy retailers each year. This amendment will allow them to obtain certificates registered prior to 31 January of the year following the obligation year, and this brings the program more in line with similar programs interstate, such as in New South Wales. This is expected to enable more efficient trading of certificates and reduce the cost of the VEU program, which is ultimately reflected in consumers' energy bills. The bill also allows for future VEU program discounts to be targeted to specific cohorts – for instance, vulnerable and low-income consumers – to enable greater access to participate in the VEU program in future as cost-of-living pressures increase.

We have heard some interesting commentary from the opposition in the other place and here on both of these bills. I think what it does enforce to me is that we are focused as a government on getting the energy transition right, and I do not believe that the opposition are really prioritising Victorians' safety in some of the questions and some of the comments that I have heard in today's debate. This energy safety bill absolutely strengthens safety and compliance within the gas industry. It does support plumbers and businesses to provide gas services, to the contrary of what the opposition have claimed. Only people who do the wrong thing, who put safety and the community at risk, will face negative consequences from this bill. To be clear, the bill does not in any way prevent qualified gas fitters and plumbers from fixing gas appliances. Immediate suspension powers target unsafe practices, protecting

public safety and maintaining industry integrity. These new reforms create a safer and more transparent industry that benefits skilled professionals and ensures confidence in energy services.

I want to be very clear about how the opposition is twisting the truth of the cost of the VEU scheme to consumers. We have heard them bang on about how it is the most expensive scheme of its kind in the country and that it increases consumers' energy bills – nothing could be further from the truth. There is no way that anybody responsible could make these claims. This program is the largest and most ambitious of any energy efficiency scheme in Australia. While it saves consumers on up-front costs of appliances by providing discounts and provides ongoing savings to their energy bills by improved energy efficiency, it also avoids costs that consumers would incur if the scheme did not exist. Between 2021 and 2025 the VEU program will avoid \$3.8 billion in energy system costs that would be required if the scheme did not exist. Even those who do not participate in the program will save on their bills as a consequence of the program, with households saving \$150 and businesses saving \$870. This is because improved energy efficiency in some households means lower overall demand for electricity, and when you improve the supply–demand balance in the electricity market, you get lower wholesale electricity prices, which flows on to lower retail prices. Between 2010 and 2020 the VEU program reduced wholesale electricity prices on average by 2.2 per cent annually.

We are getting on with the job of slashing Victorians' energy bills, reducing the state's emissions and keeping Victorians safe as we continue our energy transition, and I commend both bills to the house.

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

#### *Second reading*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** The question is:

That the bill be now read a second time.

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

*Ayes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

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

#### **Motion agreed to.**

#### **Read second time.**

#### *Instruction to committee*

**The PRESIDENT (17:03):** In consideration of amendments circulated by Minister Stitt, it is my view that the amendments are not within the scope of the bill. Therefore an instruction motion pursuant to standing order 14.11 is required.

**Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:03):** I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have power to consider amendments and new clauses to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to enable licensees that sell electricity to more than 5000 customers, rather than the Essential Services Commission, to set the rate or rates at which those licensees purchase small renewable energy generation electricity from customers.

#### **Motion agreed to.**

#### **Committed.**

*Committee***Clause 1 (17:05)**

**David DAVIS:** Minister, the amendments you are making amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to enable licensees to sell electricity to more than 5000 customers, rather than the Essential Services Commission, and to set the rate or rates at which the licensees purchase small renewable energy generation electricity from customers. This is the feed-in tariff in effect, and the government has already reduced the feed-in tariff to half of squiddly did – it is not worth a pinch of salt. In a sense this is formalising the government's execution of the feed-in tariff; I think this is in effect what is going on. I ask: has the government modelled the impact of this? Is there any modelling or understanding of what is going on with this? How is it likely, for example, to impact on what is paid to customers?

**Ingrid STITT:** Mr Davis, contrary to what you have put, the reality is that the real savings for consumers come via having solar in the first place. There is very little now because of the –

**David DAVIS:** Because it is very small. It has been reduced to next to nothing. It used to be larger.

**Ingrid STITT:** Well, the issue here is that having solar power is where consumers receive the savings. Because of the significant uptake of solar, the feed-in tariffs are not worth what they might have been worth originally when they were first introduced.

**David DAVIS:** Essentially, I think the minister is confirming what I have said – that now under the government's regime, although many people installed solar photovoltaic (PV) systems in good faith, seeking to get what were at various points greater or lesser attraction in terms of feed-in tariffs, the feed-in tariffs in the recent round have been reduced to virtually nothing. They are just the tiniest amount – 0.4 cents or whatever it is. The only thing I would say about this amendment is it will not allow the feed-in tariffs to be less than zero. I think that is the truth of the matter. Minister, my question is: do you have any modelling of the impact on the financial position of consumers?

**Ingrid STITT:** Mr Davis, there is no specific modelling that has been undertaken, but what we are doing here is removing the minimum. That is not to say that energy companies will not provide a feed-in tariff, but we are removing the minimum. What we found in other jurisdictions –

**David DAVIS:** You are inserting a new minimum of zero.

**Ingrid STITT:** Yes, that is right.

**David DAVIS:** If I could just conclude this, I just really want to make a comment at this point. People have undertaken PV solar with good faith, and the government has not delivered on the undertakings and understandings there. The government has in fact reneged on many of those points. Now, I understand why the government is doing that. We are at certain points in the day awash with solar, and at other points we are very short of energy in different ways, but at points the government actually has the opposite problem in many respects now. It is important I think to note that the government is now doing this without modelling and in what I think would be fair to describe as a breach of good faith. Whether it is technically a breach is a different question, but it is certainly a breach of good faith for those who have in genuine steps embarked on solar PV with an understanding that they would get a feed-in tariff. That has now gone.

**David LIMBRICK:** I also have a question about the feed-in tariff rate. I understand why the government would want to have a market rate instead of a minimum legislated rate, because at many times the value of that power going onto the network is effectively worthless, because it is not required. But we also have a problem where sometimes so much of that electricity has been put onto the network that we have negative rates. The government seems to have made a decision to insulate people from negative rates. Is it the case that when there are negative price events on the network because of setting the limit to zero, other users on the network will be paying for that cost of putting it onto the network?

**Ingrid STITT:** The solar feed-in tariff payments customers receive for the excess electricity that their solar panels generate and then send back to the electricity grid were hugely successful in encouraging the uptake of solar PV systems by households when they were introduced some 15 years ago. The Victorian government incentives for solar uptake started with the premium feed-in tariff, with further iterations of that obviously over a number of different years and moving to the current market-driven FIT arrangements. Since 2019 the amount of rooftop solar in Victoria has really increased significantly – by almost 78 per cent. We had around 793,000 systems as of 31 December 2024. This has both increased supply and reduced demand for electricity during the middle of the day, resulting in much cheaper daytime wholesale electricity prices and decreasing the value of the daytime solar exports. So really the market is driving this situation, which is why we are bringing the house amendment.

**David LIMBRICK:** Yes, I agree, it has lowered the value of that electricity exported to the point where not only is it sometimes worthless but sometimes it costs money to put it onto the network. But by setting the value at zero, the government is effectively insulating those solar panel owners from that negative pricing event when they occur, and they do occur sometimes. So who is paying for that? If it is not the solar panel owner, they are effectively getting a free service by dumping electricity onto the network on a negative price event. Who is paying for it? It cannot be the solar owner, surely.

**Ingrid STITT:** It still provides a really meaningful addition to our energy grid. As I said in answer to Mr Davis's question, the real savings for consumers are in having renewable solar on their roof in the first place – that is, because they are generating their own electricity. Now with battery storage becoming so much more accessible through both technological improvements but also government incentives, this is really driving the situation that we have today with very low daytime wholesale electricity rates.

**David DAVIS:** On another matter, this bill removes a number of independent advisory committees. Where did the government receive advice to get rid of these committees? Is there a report? Is there an assessment that they decided to execute these committees, figuratively?

**Ingrid STITT:** Yes, the bill does abolish the statutory establishment of the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee (ELCCC) and the Victorian Electrolysis Committee. It is really being driven by a desire to streamline our governance and reduce administrative complexity but also to strengthen the operational efficiency, and these changes reflect a shift towards a more adaptable and responsive engagement method across the sector. The requirements of the formal committees prescribed in legislation involve quite significant administrative overheads, and they may not always be the most effective way to address emerging issues. Instead, Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) will engage with technical experts and with industry representatives and stakeholders through much more flexible, tailored consultation mechanisms. This is not radical. This is in line with the way in which a number of different entities and statutory bodies operate. The approach will enable faster, more targeted input, ensuring that decision-making processes remain informed by relevant expertise and stakeholder feedback without the procedural delays associated with standing committees.

**David DAVIS:** My question is: is there a report or an examination or advice that the minister was given, or the department was given, on these matters?

**Ingrid STITT:** Certainly the relevant department, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), has been consulting with industry and will as a result of these amendments continue to consult with relevant technical experts as and when the need arises.

**David DAVIS:** I do not know whether the minister is misunderstanding me, but was there a report or formal advice or some other material that was presented to the minister or the department advising that these committees be gotten rid of? Was there some examination? Was there an independent report? How did this come about?

**Ingrid STITT:** Consistent with the way I have already answered this, this was careful advice given to the minister by the department after consulting with Energy Safe Victoria and also with the committees that are the subject of your question.

**David DAVIS:** So there was not an independent report, it seems, from what you are saying.

**Ingrid STITT:** Well, not unusual for the minister to –

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Minister, Mr Davis has the call.

**Ingrid STITT:** I thought that was a question. Sorry.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Are you finished? Okay. Minister, you still need to wait for the call.

**Ingrid STITT:** My apologies, Deputy President. I thought that I had the call. Mr Davis, it is not unusual for ministers to have advice from their departments of these sorts of reforms, particularly when it comes to strengthening governance arrangements across government.

**David DAVIS:** I am going to put on record that we do not think it does strengthen governance arrangements; we think it in fact clearly directly weakens the governance arrangements. But the electric line clearance committee in particular has given advice that the minister and department have not enjoyed, have been at odds with. Isn't the truth of the matter that this is an attempt just to nobble a committee that has given advice the government does not like?

**Ingrid STITT:** Certainly not.

**David DAVIS:** Well, I am just going to put on record again, having read through the minutes and agendas of the electric line clearance committee, that I think the committee has done very good work and I think the committee's approach is exemplary, and I think it is very unfortunate that the government, which is at odds with it on at least one matter, has decided to abolish the committee part way through some of its attempted reforms, and in that sense that is why we are moving amendments to protect those independent committees.

**Ingrid STITT:** I have already indicated very clearly that that is absolutely not the case, Mr Davis, and your assertions are factually incorrect.

**David LIMBRICK:** I would just like to ask a couple of questions about clauses 21 and 22 related to powers of entry. Firstly, when utilising these powers of entry, will authorised officers or enforcement officers be required to comply with the Essential Service Commission's Land Access Code of Practice?

**Ingrid STITT:** No, Mr Limbrick, there is no requirement for officers to comply with the Essential Services Commission's Land Access Code of Practice. The ESC Land Access Code of Practice regulates the rules and processes that licensed electricity transmission companies must follow when they are accessing or seeking to access private land using statutory powers under the Electricity Industry Act 2000. When exercising a power of entry, an authorised officer must comply with provisions related to that power of entry under the relevant act and the conditions of the applicable search warrant or other warrants, if any. In contrast, authorised officers access land and premises on behalf of the regulator to undertake compliance and enforcement activities under the energy safety legislation.

**David LIMBRICK:** The bill lowers the bar for applying for a warrant to enter premises. Can the government explain the rationale for lowering that bar? My understanding is that it lowers the bar from a section 130 standard to a proposed section 130A standard, and this no longer requires that the authorised officer has reasonable grounds that evidence of an offence exists; they only need to suspect on reasonable grounds that there is a risk to personal property or that someone is not complying with a direction. What is the rationale for lowering that bar?

**Ingrid STITT:** I have got an example here, Mr Limbrick, that I hope will illustrate and answer your question. This is an example that shows why Energy Safe need the new power to enter premises with a warrant. This is an actual example. Energy Safe was notified by Powercor of an unsafe electrical situation at a residential property in Clifton Springs and by Victoria Police of an equivalent in Werribee. The unsafe electrical situations involved DIY battery systems, and they presented a real risk of electrocution and also a risk to people and property. Energy Safe entered each of the premises with the owner-occupier's consent, made the situation safe and then issued directions requiring the owner-occupier to ensure the battery system was not connected to the property or electricity supply unless a licensed person attended and carried out necessary work to make it safe, connect it and issue a prescribed certificate of electrical safety. Under Energy Safe's existing powers they can enter residential properties only with the consent of the owner and they can issue directions. However, the existing powers of entry rely on cooperation with the owner-occupier, and that may not always be provided. Also, directions powers do not currently provide for Energy Safe to return and enter to check compliance with the directions that have been issued.

The bill proposes new powers that will allow an authorised Energy Safe officer to apply to a magistrate for the issuing of a warrant to enter any land or premises, including residential premises, where there is a risk to safety or a significant risk of property damage or to check compliance with a direction. That is the scenario, if you like, which explains why, with the court's approval, a warrant would be needed in order to ensure public safety and compliance with directions.

**David LIMBRICK:** In that particular example that the minister gave, is it the position of the government that if consent was not provided, the current powers would be such that they could not enter, because even though they were informed by the police and the power company that something existed they did not actually have evidence other than that someone said they thought there was a homemade battery there? Under this situation, because they have reasonable grounds – and the reasonable grounds are being informed by police or the energy company – therefore this is a more appropriate situation, and in the example provided, if consent was not given, they would have been unable to do their job?

**Ingrid STITT:** Spot on, Mr Limbrick.

**David LIMBRICK:** I thank the minister for that clarification. I am satisfied with that level of safeguard.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, I would invite you to move your amendment 1, which tests your amendments 2 to 12.

**David DAVIS:** I move:

1. Clause 1, lines 8 to 10, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

For the convenience of members in the chamber, it is the first amendment, and it seeks to prevent the abolition of the independent committees that have statutory underpinning: the electric line clearance committee and the electrolysis committee.

We firmly believe that properly constituted committees that have some legislative protection have a role in providing advice to government and ministers. It may be highly convenient for ministers to get rid of troublesome committees, but we do not think it is good practice. We have heard that there has been no formal assessment of this in any way. It has been dreamed up in the department. There has been no sensible set of steps to show that this is necessary. In fact we think it actually weakens the independent technical advice. These are highly technical committees; it is technicians and specialists who are on the committees. This minister in particular – not this minister, the minister in the other chamber – would much prefer to choose her own people and do it in a way where she can pick and choose the exact advice she wants at a particular point.

**David LIMBRICK:** I just have a question to the minister. What would be the cost saving of abolishing these committees?

**Ingrid STITT:** My advice on that question is that the cost for taxpayers is around \$180,000 per annum to comply with the rules in the Electricity Safety Act 1998 dealing with the two committees. The main costs are around recruitment and appointment processes for those committees.

**David LIMBRICK:** The Libertarian Party is happy to abolish these committees and will not be supporting this amendment.

**Ingrid STITT:** I will just put a few things on the record in opposing Mr Davis's amendments 1 to 12. The ELCCC's purpose is redundant. The ELCCC used to advise ESV when remaking the code of practice in the electric line clearance regulations, but ESV no longer has this role. DEECA is now responsible for preparing for the consultation and the making of regulations as the policymaker, which is best practice. ESV will continue to need to consult on line clearance and electrolysis matters once the committees are no longer prescribed in the act. This is not about cutting out consultation; it is about improving flexibility, cutting red tape and reducing administrative cost and burden.

As I just indicated in the answer to Mr Limbrick's question, the committees cost around \$180,000 per annum to comply with the rules in the Electricity Safety Act dealing with the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee and, in addition, \$80,000 per annum to comply with the Victorian Electrolysis Committee. I am just not clear why the opposition would want to allow the regulator to not better use their funds to keep Victorians safe, because that is what the reforms and the amendments are all about.

**David DAVIS:** I think it is important to put on record that if the government is going to have these technical inputs, which it will need from time to time, it is going to have to appoint committees in any event, if that is what the government's argument is. If the government is happy to run without those technical inputs, well, there you are. It indicates that the government is prepared to not have that technical input. I think here they are caught either way. They either intend to use technical experts, as they are asserting, or not. If they are intending to use them, the saving will not be there. If they are not intending to use them, there are a range of questions as to why they would not.

**Ingrid STITT:** At the risk of labouring this, Mr Davis, these are not technical inputs, they are interested parties, and I have already explained how the department will ensure that technical advice is sought and received.

#### **Council divided on amendment:**

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

*Noes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

#### **Amendment negatived.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Minister, I invite you to move your amendment, which tests all your remaining amendments.

**Ingrid STITT:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 3, after line 13 insert –

“(ea) to amend the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** to enable licensees that sell electricity to more than 5000 customers, rather than the Essential Services Commission, to set the rate or rates at

which those licensees purchase small renewable energy generation electricity from customers; and”.

**Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.**

**Clause 2 (17:45)**

**Ingrid STITT:** I move:

2. Clause 2, line 17, after “7” insert “, 7A”.

**Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 3 to 91 agreed to.**

**Clause 92 (17:45)**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

13. Clause 92, after line 33 insert –

‘(6) After section 19(5) of the **Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005** insert –

“(5A) Subject to subsection (5B), Energy Safe Victoria must publish a copy of the completed plan, as existing from time to time, on its Internet site.

(5B) The copy of the plan published under subsection (5A) must not contain any information of a confidential or commercially-sensitive nature.”.

- (7) For section 19(6) of the **Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005** substitute –

“(6) Energy Safe Victoria must consult with the Minister before publishing or making available a corporate plan for the purposes of this Division.”.’.

This is to ensure that if there are modifications to the corporate plan this is published.

**Ingrid STITT:** Forcing ESV to publish an annual corporate plan only increases administrative costs without increasing accountability. On this side of the house we want ESV to be able to direct their resources where they see fit and reduce administrative burden. Moving this requirement to every three years makes sense, and Energy Safe Victoria’s annual report is the primary mechanism for public accountability. The bill makes no change to the annual report process, which is produced annually, tabled in Parliament and published. Energy Safe already voluntarily publishes its corporate plan, and other regulators do not face additional prescription as proposed in the house amendment. A number of similar regulators – for example, the Environment Protection Authority Victoria and the Essential Services Commission – do not have any statutory requirements to prepare corporate plans. Other regulators such as Dairy Food Safety Victoria under the Dairy Act 2000 are only required to submit a corporate plan every five years. It is clear that those opposite are happy to see ESV’s resources tied up where they are not needed rather than ensuring Victorians are safe.

**David DAVIS:** The authority could well simply put it on its website. It might take a few moments.

**Council divided on amendment:**

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

*Noes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Amendment negatived.**

**Clause agreed to; clause 93 agreed to.**

**Clause 94 (17:50)**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

14. Clause 94, lines 27 to 31, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –  
“(3) Energy Safe Victoria must consult with the Minister before publishing or making available an annual update for the purposes of this Division.”.
15. Clause 94, page 74, after line 4 insert –  
“(4A) Subject to subsection (4B), Energy Safe Victoria must publish a copy of the annual update, as existing from time to time, on its Internet site.  
(4B) The copy of the annual update published under subsection (4A) must not contain any information of a confidential or commercially-sensitive nature.”.

We have discussed the principles here, so this would require any publication of any annual update.

**Ingrid STITT:** The government will not be supporting Mr Davis’s amendments for the reasons already outlined.

**Amendments negated; clause agreed to; clauses 95 and 96 agreed to.**

**Clause 97 (17:51)**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

16. Clause 97, line 8, before “Nothing” insert “(1)”.  
17. Clause 97, line 17, omit ‘(a).’ and insert “(a).”.
18. Clause 97, after line 17 insert –  
“(2) If the Minister enters into an agreement to lease land referred to in subsection (1)(a), the Minister must, no later than the day on which the Minister enters into a lease pursuant to that agreement, publish on the Internet site of the Department a notice specifying –
  - (a) the market value of the rights granted by the lease at the time the agreement to lease is entered into; and
  - (b) the market value of the rights granted by the lease at the time the lease is to be entered into pursuant to the agreement (if different from the value referred to in paragraph (a)); and
  - (c) the method used to calculate the values referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b); and
  - (d) any other information that the Minister considers appropriate.”.

This set of amendments requires publication of the value of the rights that are transferred.

**Ingrid STITT:** The Land Act 1958 already requires that privately negotiated leases must be advertised not less than 14 days before the day the lease is to be granted in the *Government Gazette* and in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the land is situated. Additionally, rent value must be compliant with the Victorian government land transactions policy to ensure conduct of all land transactions across government is done in a consistent, accountable and transparent way. Through this amendment the opposition are publicly advocating for worse negotiated outcomes for the Victorian state. They want us to be worse off compared to our interstate competitors by weakening our negotiating position. It is bad public policy, frankly, and this amendment would reduce investment appetite in our state as it would give commercial competitors an unfair advantage in terms of knowledge of at least one of the inputs into the proponent’s business model. It is also clear in negotiations with commercial proponents that maintaining commercial-in-confidence practices is incredibly important for their investment. So the government will not be supporting these amendments. They are simply inappropriate, and we will not be supporting them.

**David LIMBRICK:** Although I appreciate what the opposition is trying to do here, I actually share the government’s concerns about putting Victoria in a much weaker negotiating position. Therefore the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this amendment.

**David DAVIS:** This is a transparency measure with the alienation of public land in this way, and there is nothing wrong with seeing the value that is transferred in this way. It may be inconvenient for governments from time to time; I mean, this government hates transparency and frankly loves commercial-in-confidence excuses and a secretive approach. We know what they are up to. We know the scale.

**Amendments negated; clause agreed to.**

**New clauses (17:54)**

**Ingrid STITT:** I move:

3. Insert the following New Part after Part 7 –

**‘Part 7A – Amendment of Electricity Industry Act 2000**

**97A Section 40FBA substituted**

For section 40FBA of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** substitute –

**“40FBA Rates for purchases of small renewable energy generation electricity**

For the purposes of section 40FB(2)(a), in each financial year the amount to be credited against the charges payable to a relevant licensee by a customer who is a relevant generator is the amount determined at the rate or rates published as part of the general renewable energy feed-in terms and conditions under section 40G.”.

**97B Section 40FBB repealed**

Section 40FBB of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** is repealed.

**97C Retailer licence condition relating to purchase of small renewable energy generation electricity**

- (1) For section 40G(1)(a) of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** substitute –
  - “(a) to publish general renewable energy feed-in terms and conditions including, but not limited to, a rate or rates for the purposes of section 40FBA; and”.
- (2) After section 40G(1) of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** insert –
  - “(1A) A rate included in the general renewable energy feed-in terms and conditions for the purposes of section 40FBA must not be less than \$0.00 per kilowatt-hour.”.

**97D New section 124 inserted**

After section 123 of the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** insert –

**“124 Savings provision – Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act 2025**

- (1) Despite the amendments made to this Act by Part 7A of the amending Act, the rate or rates applying for the 2024 financial year under section 40FBA (as in force immediately before the commencement of section 97A of the amending Act) for the purposes of section 40FB(2)(a) are taken to continue to apply until 30 June 2025 for the purposes of section 40FB(2)(a).
- (2) This section does not affect or take away from the **Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984**.
- (3) In this section –

*amending Act* means the **Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act 2025**.”.

**New clauses agreed to; clause 98 agreed to; schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.**

**Long title (17:55)**

**Ingrid STITT:** I move:

4. Long title, omit “and the **Land Act 1958**” and insert “, the **Land Act 1958** and the **Electricity Industry Act 2000**”.

This is an excellent amendment, and I commend it to the house.

**Amendment agreed to; amended long title agreed to.**

**Reported to house with amendments, including amended long title.**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:56): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:56): I move:

That the bill now be read a third time and do pass.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendment.

**Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**The PRESIDENT:** The question is:

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Council divided on motion:**

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

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Committed.**

*Committee***Clause 1 (18:04)**

**David DAVIS:** I should indicate that the amendments and the running sheet do not quite align, so what I might do to expedite this matter for the chamber is explain the points that we are trying to achieve with a number of these steps here. One of the matters that we seek to deal with is the matter around the targets and the change in the targets. The second is around the strategic review. There is the discussion paper, the Victorian energy upgrades strategic review. What I would foreshadow is that this set of steps can be tested in two ways. Firstly, the issues around the targets can be tested by amendment 1, and if we were successful in moving amendment 1, that would be a test for our matters around targets. And amendment 3 would be a test for our view that the strategic review should be a more public process and should ultimately be tabled in Parliament.

I should bring to the chamber's attention that amendment 3 has one small matter that attention should be drawn to, and that is: where it says 'Clause 1' and then talks about the insertion '(ba)' to provide for completion of the strategic review of the Victorian energy upgrades scheme – instead of the Victorian energy efficiency target (VEET) scheme – there is just a typo in that amendment. These are my amendments on amendment sheet DD171C, to be precise.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Okay. So these are all to clause 1?

**David DAVIS:** Yes, they are, because they will effectively test the later points.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Do you wish to move them separately or do you wish to just vote on them as a block?

**David DAVIS:** No, I wish to move 1 as a test for the target matter.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** So we will move 1, 2 and 3 separately?

**David DAVIS:** No, 1 and 3 are sufficient, I think, is my reading of it.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** We have to move 1 to 3; we cannot move 1 and 3 and not move 2.

**David DAVIS:** That is right, but I am conscious that I am looking for a test for each of the topics.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** So you want to vote on them separately.

**David DAVIS:** 1 and 3 on the amendment sheet.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Yes. So we have to vote on 1, 2 and 3 separately.

Mr Davis, can you move your amendments 1 to 3, please?

**David DAVIS:** I will move amendment 1. I move:

1. Clause 1, line 8, omit "target," and insert "target; and".

**Ingrid STITT:** I just want to indicate for the record that the government will not be supporting this amendment. This is a bit of a try-on, in our view, and it has been something that every time we have brought a bill to this place in relation to our strong transition plan for the energy system in Victoria the opposition have sought to play games with that. I do not believe that they are committed to the work of the VEU. They do not want to assess the functioning of the VEU, they want to abolish the VEU; they have said that many times. They even tried to do that when they were last in government. So it is very clear to us that they do not have a positive thing to say about the VEU, even though this has been a highly successful and strongly subscribed scheme which has helped drive down the power bills for Victorians. We will not be supporting this amendment; in fact we will not be supporting any of Mr Davis's amendments in relation to this bill.

**David DAVIS:** I just make a number of points. First of all, this change in the targeting that the government has set up is a bit of a play by the government to make a softer set of arrangements, a more flexible set of arrangements for them in the next couple of years; that is what that is all about, so they can publish separately from their previously stated publication arrangements and targets. They are actually seeking to add a new set of arrangements in there, so they are moving the goalposts, if I can put it that way – shifting the goalposts while the game that they have put in action is up and running.

In response to the minister's points about the energy upgrades scheme, I have made my points very clear on the energy upgrades scheme, and I did that in the second-reading debate at length. We support the idea of energy efficiency programs and sensible programs. This is a sensible concept, but it has to be delivered properly too. If you have got an absolute dog of a program – no-one would think that pink batts turned out a great program at a national level, for example. Kevin Rudd, frankly, through his program caused the death of a number of Australians. That was a shocking outcome. No-one thought that that was a good outcome, whatever the intent. We accept that the government's intent with the VEU is a good one, but we do not think it has been implemented properly. Frankly, when you see the six fridges lined up outside the business it is very hard to see that that is a well-run program. Even the minister admitted that there were big problems. The doorknockers and the strange arrangements, people putting fans into people's homes – all of this became a bit of a circus.

In response to the minister's point about our view on the energy upgrades program, we support the idea of energy upgrades to achieve energy efficiency, but as I said, it is got to be run properly. When you look at the certificate prices in Victoria, they have escalated massively. About \$700 million a year is being spent on the program – massive cross-subsidies. The question is: could this be done better? As I said in the second-reading debate, if you spent the same amount of money and you had an efficiently running program, you would have more abatement; you would actually abate more carbon dioxide. That seems to be the aim of the game. Alternatively, if you spent the money efficiently and abated the same amount of carbon dioxide, you could do it at a lesser cost. That basic understanding of these programs leads you to the conclusion that they have been poorly run. That is separate from a view that energy efficiency is not an important way of dealing with net zero challenges. We think it is a sensible way, and whether it is in government buildings or whether it is in a range of other areas, there are there are sensible steps that can be taken. So I reject the minister's view that we are opposed to or we will abolish the energy upgrades program. We would want that program to run properly and efficiently. I do not think there is anything wrong with that; that is actually common sense. I make the point that the minister said this in response to this very first amendment, which is about prescribing the VEU scheme targets, and that is not quite the same as the energy efficiency program.

**Council divided on amendment:**

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

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

**Amendment negatived.**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

3. Clause 1, page 2, before line 1 insert –

“(ba) to provide for completion of a strategic review of the VEU scheme and tabling requirements relating to a report of the strategic review; and”.

This is an insertion in the objectives. It is entirely consistent with the nature of the bill. The government is doing a strategic review. A discussion paper has been produced, but this has not been done transparently; the submissions are not public, and the department is doing a review on itself.

With the department marking its own homework, we believe that there needs to be greater transparency here. With the energy efficiency upgrades program review being undertaken by the department, we say that this should be completed as soon as practicable, but we say particularly we want to see this made public and tabled at an early point.

**Ingrid STITT:** The government will not be supporting this amendment. As I indicated in my comments in the second-reading debate, the bill allows regulations to set targets in two-year tranches rather than every five years while the program undergoes its strategic review. The review is currently underway, and it will modernise and strengthen the program to ensure it continues to support Victorians to make the transition away from fossil fuel energy to renewables. The target-setting will go back to five-year tranches once we hit 2030 and any review outcomes have taken effect.

**Council divided on amendment:**

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

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

**Amendment negatived.**

**Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 61 agreed to.**

**Reported to house without amendment.**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:24): I move:

That the report now be adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:24): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

**Council divided on motion:**

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

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

*Adjournment*

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:30): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Melbourne Holocaust Museum**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:31): (1593) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister Stitt, and the action that I am seeking is an update on what support is being provided to Victoria's Jewish community, including in particular the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, to promote safety and understanding and to reduce instances of antisemitism and vilification. Recently, along with colleagues from all sides of this Parliament, I had the great opportunity of taking part in the March of the Living at Auschwitz in Poland. It was a very sombre occasion marking 80 years this year since the liberation of the death camps, including at Auschwitz, and it was very special to take part in what was the first delegation of politicians from Australia in such an event. It was great to be joined by Mr Batchelor in this place, the member for Caulfield and the member for Box Hill in the other place, who coordinated it, and also the members for Gippsland East, Lowan, Albert Park, Prahran and Brighton.

It was, as I say, a very sombre experience to take part in and very meaningful to be part of the first delegation to take part in the March of the Living, a march which reclaims what was once part of the death marches at the end of the horrors of that particular site in Auschwitz. To take part along with around 8000 other people was a meaningful show of force of 'Never again'. It was a good opportunity as well to immerse in some of the history of that part of the world. Indeed we know that Melbourne is home to the largest number of Holocaust survivors. It was particularly in remembrance of their struggles and their journeys to see the life of the Jewish community in Poland before the war, which was very important to acknowledge, and also then during. We met with many incredible people, including Mark Spigelman and his wife Rachel from Sydney. Mark was a Holocaust survivor who survived the ghettos and the camps as a young child. We were also joined by Sue Hampel, the president of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, who was insightful and made the experience all the more valuable for us all, seeing the horrors and the absolute tragedy of what was one of the worst mass killings of people and the systematic destruction of Jewish life entirely in eastern Europe. We do have a strong Jewish community here in Melbourne, and I know that many are very proud to support them. We must continue to stand against all forms of antisemitism and racism. That is why remembrance activities, such as the March of the Living, are so important to acknowledge.

**Drought relief**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:34): (1594) My adjournment debate is for the Minister for Agriculture. Minister, drought conditions are impacting much of Gippsland, with local farmers fearing the worst as dry conditions stretch statewide. Paddocks are sparse with fodder, and I have been contacted by a number of local farmers concerned about their livestock and their livelihoods. The mental health of primary producers is of the utmost concern as financial pressures mount, and yet the Allan Labor government is overwhelmingly ignoring our farmers' plea for assistance. Instead of providing real relief, Labor has committed to \$60 million less than the South Australian government under similar conditions. Water is so critical, and soil moisture is drying up. Dams are drying up, and there is no decent rainfall in the foreseeable future.

Evidence from the BOM shows that there have been severe or serious rainfall deficiencies – and by that I mean rainfall totals in the 5 to 10 per cent periods respectively, the lowest since the 1900s –

indeed across western and south-western Victoria but also parts of Gippsland. One Inverloch farmer has outlined for me today that he has been forced to destock, and in doing that he is leaving himself with virtually no cows or calves, which are the main source of his annual income. An oversupply of destock cattle is arriving at the Koonwarra saleyards, and prices are flagging. Not only are they working under hugely tough conditions, their price return is diminishing.

Every day it fails to deliver assistance Labor forces farmers to make impossible decisions to keep livestock alive. Labor has spruiked that it is firing up its desalination plant in order to water the backyards of people in Melbourne and Geelong, but it is leaving farmers high and dry. Instead of providing real drought relief to farmers, the Allan government is ramming through this emergency services tax, which will increase the tax burden on farmers once again with a 189 per cent tax increase. During a cost-of-living crisis and drought it is unthinkable that Labor is asking more from our farmers, yet again this is exactly what it is doing.

The action I call on the minister to do is to provide immediate and targeted help for drought-affected families and areas, including but not limited to subsidised fodder and feed supplies for livestock, subsidised water supply for agricultural purposes, and financial assistance with fodder and water delivery. Minister, please listen.

### **Koala management**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:37): (1595) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for an independent review to be undertaken into the aerial shooting of koalas in Victoria. Following a bushfire in the Budj Bim National Park on 10 March over 1000 koalas have been euthanised through aerial and ground shooting as part of a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) led animal welfare response. Of the 2219 koalas assessed, 48 per cent were found to be suffering severe injuries and burns and were subsequently shot from the air and forest floor, with virtually no communication or transparency provided to the community. In the weeks that have followed my office has been contacted by concerned individuals from around the world deeply distressed by the scale and the lack of transparency surrounding this operation, and they are demanding answers.

I fully acknowledge that while many koalas may have initially survived the fire, a significant number were suffering from burns, injuries and smoke inhalation or were indirectly impacted by the loss of food, water and habitat. Without urgent intervention these animals faced a slow, agonising and inevitable death. When animals are suffering beyond help, humane intervention is often necessary. However, my concern lies in the methods used and the deeply troubling questions surrounding the way this response was carried out.

Serious questions have been raised about the likelihood of koalas being inaccurately shot, resulting in prolonged and unnecessary suffering for already vulnerable animals. There was no capacity to properly check the pouches of female koalas prior to shooting, placing dependent joeys at extreme risk of being orphaned or killed. In some instances ground-based shooting was carried out despite the potential availability of more controlled and more humane euthanasia methods being available to them. Only one wildlife vet was involved throughout the entire operation, and while a third-party review took place to assess this plan, there are still significant concerns about the adequacy of their oversight and welfare monitoring during such a large-scale response.

I am sure that I do not need to convince this room that koalas being shot out of the sky is an absolutely horrendous situation that should have, at the very, least required clear, timely and compassionate communication with the community, who care so deeply about our koalas. An independent review into DEECA's actions will allow us to understand how these decisions were made, whether appropriate protocols were followed and whether the operation met the standards expected by the Victorian public. I urge the minister to initiate an independent, transparent investigation into this matter so that we can learn from what occurred and ensure that such a devastating response is never repeated in our state.

### Bail laws

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:40): (1596) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is an update on how the Labor government's new bail reforms are working. In March 2025 the Attorney-General outlined the new bail laws, saying:

These laws are targeted squarely at the risks of young people committing serious crimes while out on bail.

The opposition have unveiled their proposed bail policy, which does nothing for community safety but would uplift petty crimes like shoplifting to the same category as manslaughter. I look forward to the Attorney's update.

### Banmira Specialist School

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:41): (1597) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the minister to ensure that the 2025–26 state budget provides full funding to complete the buildings and facilities at Banmira Specialist School in Shepparton so that all students can be on the one campus. When the controversial decision was made to close Shepparton's four public secondary schools and merge them into a single campus mega school, the community made it clear that they wanted the old school sites to be retained for educational purposes. The site of the former Wanganui Park Secondary College on Parkside Drive was chosen to become the new home for the Verney Road School, a specialist school providing learning opportunities for students aged three to 18 with intellectual disabilities. Verney Road School was built in 1999 and designed for 75 students, but it has grown rapidly and now has over 250 students and over a hundred staff. It needed a bigger home, and the Victorian government promised \$24 million in the 2022–23 state budget to upgrade the old Parkside Drive site and make it fit for the students moving over from Verney Road to the new school, now called Banmira Specialist School.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Banmira Specialist School, and I was delighted to see students eagerly learning in their new, modern, state-of-the-art classrooms, guided by wonderful teachers who are helping them to realise their full potential and showing them that they are valued and respected. During my visit one thing troubled me: a fence has been constructed to cordon off almost half the school, where old classrooms are boarded up awaiting further funding to complete the school. The state government's failure to provide funding to upgrade the entire school has meant that only primary school and early years students have been able to move across from Verney Road to the Parkside Drive campus. These students are enjoying their bright new classrooms, but the secondary school students are stuck back in the old buildings at the Verney Road site. And many of the primary students who are enjoying the new facilities this year will have to move back to the older buildings when they reach their secondary school years. The students who attend Banmira Specialist School need consistency. Making them transition from Verney Road to Parkside Drive and then back to Verney Road will have a negative impact on their sense of stability and could hinder their learning, which is the last thing we want for these vulnerable children. The delivery of classes across two sites presents many challenges for the school, including financial challenges due to inefficiencies, and creates real, practical challenges for staff, who need to shuttle back and forth between the two sites that are 3.5 kilometres apart, creating delays and disruptions to instructional time. It is essential that the 2025–26 state budget provides full funding for the completion of the Parkside Drive campus so that all the Banmira students and staff can be on one single site enjoying the educational, technological and quality learning environment that these students deserve.

### Health services

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:44): (1598) My adjournment matter tonight is to the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for hospital funding to be increased in the upcoming budget. One of my staff recently gave birth, and they wanted me to share a message about their experience. These are their words:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I want to firstly thank the incredible team at Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital for being there every step of the way, especially at the pointy end in what was a pretty traumatic birth. I literally couldn't have done it without them. The hospital being named after a former Labor Premier is quite ironic as Aiv delivers my plea to this Labor government.

Whilst the care I received was amazing, it was amazing in the context of what was in their control. I would never blame them for funding barriers, but they exist. And when you are going through one of the hardest things a human can, you can feel those funding shortages. It shows in the small things like access to meals being limited. If you miss the window to eat, you can't even get an extra bottle of milk, which anyone who has given birth can tell you is very easy to do, because newborns do not exactly operate on a schedule. And it shows in the big things, like being told that there are fully equipped but empty birthing suites unused because there are no funds for staffing, so instead patients are sent to a hospital 40 minutes away for inductions. It shows in the times the midwives had many patients and babies to look after – too many for one person to reasonably manage. It shows in the hours upon hours spent in the waiting room at the maternity assessment care unit waiting for a bed.

As I mentioned, my birth was traumatic. My pregnancy was high risk. I waited days for an induction due to shortages, and I was finally taken to birthing after they caught my baby's heart rate dropping rapidly. I advocated for myself and just happened to be on the monitor when it happened. But what if I wasn't? What if there wasn't a bed? What if I was still in the waiting room? Everything ended up okay, and I had my precious and perfect baby. The people who work there do an amazing job, but the last thing I want is for another parent to experience that stress at their most vulnerable time. The last thing I want is for them to feel those shortages. I urge the government to increase funding for hospitals in Victoria.

### Education system

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:46): (1599) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, Minister Carroll. Minister, the Battle for Australia ceremony is an exciting, inspirational and educational day for students. The commemoration seeks to educate Australian children to appreciate, honour and learn from the heroism, sacrifice and service of all those who fought between 1941 and 1945 to defend Australia, its territories and its national interests. The commemoration service held in September 2024 saw the attendance of 12 primary and secondary schools, with 400 students, 40 teachers, parents, invited VIP guests and many members of the public. However, since the high point of the centenary of Anzac Day a decade ago, community and veteran organisations have noticed a drop-off in school-age students' understanding of Australia's diggers and their service. That is why the action I seek is this: will the minister provide an update on what the government is doing to foster and inspire better knowledge of veterans among young people, and what programs does the Allan Labor government provide to support our veteran organisations to get schoolkids to attend events such as these.

### Health services

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:47): (1600) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health. As we are approaching budget day next Tuesday – which is touted to be a horror budget given the dire financial situation that Victoria is in thanks to the waste and mismanagement by the Allan Labor government – there are many health services who are very concerned about what will be in that budget. Last year the minister and the department secretary sent letters to health services demanding that they cut costs, basically saying that they would be provided with budgets and that was it. There was a huge outcry at the time because of the amalgamations that were being undertaken – of course a lot of those have happened. But last year the Premier then had to come in and ask the Treasurer to prop up, with a \$1.5 billion Treasurer's advance, the health services so that health services could actually provide the health care that they need to to their communities.

There is significant concern again around how our health services will be able to operate, and I am speaking to health services right around the state. The AMA, the Australian Medical Association, have raised a number of key priorities that they also want to see in the budget. They are also looking at those issues, they are talking about the things that can really provide better health services for communities and also support doctors in the work that they do. The ministerial review that was undertaken into employment terms for medical staff has been a major focus and concern of the AMA. The AMA have

asked on a number of occasions for the government to release the findings of that review, looking at the recommendations that then align with the enterprise bargaining agreements and the process that will be required for those medical staff. Now, those medical staff are integral to the operation of our public health services, and they provide tremendous support to the entire system. So the action I seek is for the government, the minister, to release that review in the interests of transparency so that the AMA and others can understand exactly the needs that are required.

### **Blackshaws Road, Altona North, pedestrian safety**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (18:50): (1601) My matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it relates to the lack of pedestrian safety along Blackshaws Road in Altona North.

Altona North is booming. The development of the proposed Altona North precinct along Blackshaws Road will see 3000 more dwellings added to the area and even more vehicles using Blackshaws Road over the coming years. Blackshaws Road is already dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists, with only a single traffic light and an ironically named pedestrian refuge in front of the Elizabeth Street shopping strip being the only safe place to cross between Millers Road and the Melbourne Road overpass, a distance of some 5 kilometres. The intersection at Millers Road is particularly treacherous and not fit to cope with the rising number of vehicles on the road. It desperately needs an upgrade to help reduce the number of accidents occurring there.

One of my constituents is vision-impaired and gets around with the aid of a guide dog and a mobility cane. In 2023 she and her guide dog were hit by a car on the Blackshaws Road left-turning lane zebra crossing. As a result, her guide dog developed anxiety and had to be retired, severely limiting her independence. She and her new guide dog were hit again in 2025, narrowly escaping serious injury. All told, my constituent has had no less than 12 near misses in the last two years.

This major intersection needs the installation of accessible pedestrian traffic signals with tactile markings to replace the zebra crossing, and better lighting. The rest of Blackshaws Road needs more traffic lights and pedestrian crossings. It is only a matter of time before a pedestrian or cyclist is killed on this busy road.

I respectfully invite the minister to visit Blackshaws Road and maybe even attempt a road crossing. I am sure she will recognise the need for additional traffic infrastructure to increase pedestrian safety in this area. Pedestrians really should not have to take their lives into their hands every time they simply want to cross the road.

### **Tiny Towns Fund**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:52): (1602) The action I seek is for the Minister for Regional Development, Minister Symes, to update the house on the successful Tiny Towns recipients in Eastern Victoria.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH**: I am very glad that Minister Shing is in the chamber at the moment, because I almost cannot say the words ‘tiny towns’ without hearing Minister Shing’s enthusiasm – you know, when the program was originally introduced. It is great to see Leader of the Nationals Danny O’Brien is in here as well, so we will give a cheerio and hello. I am sure he would love to hear about the fantastic tiny towns –

**The PRESIDENT**: Mr McIntosh, do not acknowledge people in the gallery.

**Tom McINTOSH**: I am not allowed to, sorry. Fantastic Tiny Towns projects are rolling out – 159 across Victoria as part of the \$5.1 million rollout for our rural and regional towns under 5000 people.

### Blackburn planning

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:53): (1603) The action I seek is from the Minister for Planning, and that is to save Blackburn. The residents in Blackburn are deeply worried about the future of their suburb, having been made an activity centre.

Just a few kilometres down the road in Box Hill, and again in Burwood, the government have repeatedly shown a willingness to sacrifice green space, livability and public amenity in the name of their version of development – and to bastardise the consultation process in the process. Box Hill Gardens now faces permanent destruction. Gardiners Creek in Burwood is going to have 20-storey towers either side of the creek. The Box Hill brickworks site, the last feasible open land in the area, the government is seriously considering turning into high-rise development – I think it is a certainty. This pattern of bad-faith behaviour has set off alarm bells in Blackburn and what may now occur under a Blackburn activity centre. Residents rightly fear that their suburb is in the firing line, and they want answers.

Under the new planning process, we will lose massive amounts of tree canopy; there will be less setbacks for buildings; developers will be able to overshadow neighbours, overshadow neighbours' bedroom windows and overshadow their solar panels; and the south and north parade in Blackburn is slated for eight 12- to 20-storey towers in either case.

Let us not forget in this consultation process in Ringwood the ambit claim of, 'We're going to put 20 storeys here, there and everywhere' and then, 'Look how reasonable we are; it's only going to be 12.' We are awake to that game. The community are awake to that game also. We cannot continue down this path where the community is the first casualty of bad planning every single time. The community should not have to fight, park by park, shop by shop, home by home to protect what makes their suburb livable. Blackburn residents do not want to turn into the next Box Hill, where high-rise towers tower over family homes. Blackburn deserves better. The community must not be subject to the same pseudo-consultation conducted elsewhere, and local voices should not be silenced. There is a simple action, as simple as the stroke of the pen used to throw this community under the bus in the first place, and that is: listen to the community and remove Blackburn as an activity centre. Save Blackburn.

### Private security

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:55): (1604) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Police and is related to regulations that are currently under consideration for the private security sector. It is not my normal practice to make submissions on consultations for regulations, but I did so recently. Last year this Parliament passed the Private Security and County Court Amendment Act 2024. There was no opposition to the bill, and it passed on the voices.

Reviewing the debate in *Hansard*, however, I am now left wondering whether other members realised that this bill would have a significant impact on the private investigator sector. Whilst there was a lot of discussion about private security, there was not a single mention of private investigators. My office has recently met with representatives from this industry who have seen the draft regulations under this act and are very concerned. They believe that they are not fit for purpose and the reforms passed last year create a situation where the problems it seeks to address were happening in a completely different sector. Many private investigators work part-time as subcontractors. They are registered with different companies and take jobs as they come up. The flexibility suits some people who may work around caring arrangements. It also caters to the nature of the work, where different jobs require different specialisations and experience. If the draft regulations are made as written, they will now have to get a private investigator licence and also a private security business licence simply to continue doing the work that they were already doing. This is all a needless duplication and over-regulation of a sector that has done nothing wrong and is seemingly being punished for the bad practices that occurred in a different sector.

The final report on the review of the sector focused mainly on security guards, crowd control and other aspects of private security. Private investigators barely got a mention and were not covered in the regulatory impact statement or the minister's second-reading speech. On top of the needless licence duplication, the draft regulations also impose obligations that do not make sense for private investigators, such as the requirement to complete a comprehensive risk management plan for any security activity. This is completely unworkable for private investigators, who often work in dynamic environments where they may not even be able to predict where they will be, let alone speculate on potential risks. This sector is a very important one. They are often involved in cases that fall through the cracks, such as financial crime, stalking, fraud and theft, where the police cannot or will not investigate, often presenting evidence briefs that lead to charges and convictions. My request for the minister is to simply exempt private investigators from the regulations.

### Housing

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:58): (1605) On Bluff Road in Hampton East the new social housing development being built as part of the Big Housing Build is coming on apace. The cranes are working hard. There are hundreds of workers onsite, transforming a site that was once 164 homes into 285 new homes – a 16 per cent increase of social housing on that site. It has been remarkable to see the progress of this build in recent months as these new dwellings rise up and showcase just how significant this state Labor government's investment in social housing and affordable housing in our communities has been. As this project progresses and construction continues, the action that I seek from the Minister for Housing and Building is to join me on a visit to that site to inspect this building.

### Victoria Police

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (18:59): (1606) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. In light of the increase in crime in the community and the frequent reduction in the operational hours of police stations, the action I seek is for the minister to urgently intervene to ensure the police stations in the Western Metropolitan Region are accessible to the public for a minimum of 16 hours of daily operations. Preferably, all stations are to be open for 24-hour access to the public. Residents in my region of Melbourne West are very concerned at the rise in crime. The most recent statistics from the Crime Statistics Agency highlight that over the past 12 months in Werribee and Point Cook there has been a 30 per cent increase in aggravated burglaries and robberies, an 83 per cent increase in residential aggravated burglaries, a 57 per cent increase in theft of motor vehicles, an 83 per cent increase in theft from motor vehicles and a 66 per cent increase in retail theft.

Meanwhile, as crime goes up, this Labor government's solution is to continue its reduction in the hours of operation of police stations. The Wyndham North police station in Tarneit has had its hours reduced to 8 hours. A similar situation has occurred in Avondale Heights police station, Williamstown police station and Keilor Downs police station. As a former police officer, this is not how you serve the community – by shutting your door. Meanwhile, Sunbury police station's hours have been revised to 16 hours, with the newest 24-hour police station being Gisborne, 20 k's away.

In what way is the Labor government keeping Victorians safe with all these reductions in operation hours of police stations? This is not good enough. Victorians need to have access to police stations. The Premier and the police minister need to understand policing is a service; it is not a business. Police serve the community by opening their doors. Police stations should be available to the whole community a minimum of 16 hours per day, preferably 24/7. The government must return the operating hours of police stations to normal. I ask the minister to urgently intervene, overturn their decision and open police stations for the public.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region bus services

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:02): (1607) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek, Minister, is for you to support the Fix

Dandy Buses community campaign, which is advocating for the route 802, 804 and 814 bus services in Dandenong North and Noble Park North to be included in the minimum bus service standards for this state. The minimum standard includes a seven-day bus service until 9 pm, and this has been rolled out for other less busy bus services since 2006. There is evidence that people in the Greater Dandenong area do use local buses providing there is a service available, but there are six Greater Dandenong bus routes that do not run seven days a week. So I am calling on you, Minister, to find a way to get the 802, 804 and 814 in Dandenong North and Noble Park North funded in the 2025 state budget, which will be delivered next week.

The 802 and 804 are the only transport in parts of Dandenong North. They also serve popular destinations like Dandenong Hospital, Dandenong Market, Monash University, Oasis swimming centre and Chadstone Shopping Centre, with many having significant weekend activity. In addition, these are hubs that provide services to many people throughout the south-east region. The 814 in Noble Park North is also important since its timetable is still based on shop trading hours of 40 years ago. Long gaps between buses are also an issue in Greater Dandenong, with routes such as the 804 having a 2-hour gap in the Saturday afternoon timetable. The 814 in Springvale and Noble Park North finishes as early as 1 pm on Saturdays, and the 802 does not run on weekends at all.

Every Victorian depends on infrastructure, and they use road to rail to reach work, study and services. They use public facilities and spaces to learn, play, exercise, socialise and receive care, and they depend on infrastructure to get energy and water to their homes and to connect with each other by phone and internet. As Victoria's population grows and changes more Victorians will need to use many types of infrastructure. A large bus upgrade program between 2006 and 2010 rolled out longer operating hours and a seven-day service to over 100 bus routes across Melbourne. Such minimum standards guaranteed a bus at least every hour until 9 pm seven days a week to suburbs across Melbourne. These improvements led to a big upsurge in bus patronage.

Current public transport timetables are often unsuitable for suburban retail, hospitality, industrial, weekend casual and part-time workers, as services are often not operating when people need to get to or from work. Increasing bus operating hours across Melbourne would be a welcome change to support the most disadvantaged areas, which are shown to have the least public transport. This includes areas in Mulgrave. High housing costs are forcing people to compromise on location, moving further away from jobs and services, and the current transport is scarce unless it is near a train station.

### **Drought relief**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (19:05): (1608) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture. The action I seek is for the government to commit to urgent and comprehensive drought support measures for farmers in my electorate and across regional Victoria. The extended dry conditions are putting immense pressure on farming families and rural communities. Many farmers are struggling to access basic necessities to keep their operations going. They are experiencing dwindling water supplies and financial stress and facing emotional exhaustion. I have heard from farmers and residents who are finding it increasingly difficult to purchase hay and feed for their livestock. Prices have skyrocketed and supplies are becoming scarce. Without adequate feed, farmers face heartbreaking decisions about destocking or reducing herds. Water security is also a critical issue. Families are having to purchase truckloads of water just to keep their homes and farms functioning. At the same time, farmers are unable to clean out dams and repair vital water infrastructure, because they simply do not have the resources. These works are essential to ensure farms are ready to capture and store water when the rain returns once more.

The financial stress on farming families cannot be overstated. Many are juggling mounting debts while their incomes dwindle. They are also fearful of the government's proposed Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, which will mean that they are facing an increase of an incredible 189 per cent. I recently attended a community meeting in Baringhup, where landholders discussed how fearful they are of these new charges, and it will mean thousands of dollars to some families. Today on the steps

of Parliament we had farmers protesting against the introduction of this levy. This is leading to profound mental health challenges in our regional communities, and I have spoken with farmers who feel overwhelmed and very uncertain about the future. It is critical the government provides not only financial assistance but also mental health support services that are accessible, timely and tailored to the unique challenges faced by people living and working on the land. I acknowledge that some assistance measures are currently in place, but this is simply not enough given the scale of this crisis. Last September the government announced a \$13 million package to help farmers, while South Australia is providing \$73 million in freight subsidies, mental health support and emergency tax rebates. In Victoria, fodder is scarce and freight costs are spiralling. Farmers are being forced to make impossible decisions just to keep stock alive. We need a comprehensive package of support. The Victorian Farmers Federation has also called for urgent support in the upcoming state budget.

Farmers are the backbone of our state's food production and a vital part of our economy. When farmers suffer, so does the rest of our state. The action I seek is for the minister to provide immediate targeted help to drought-affected areas, including but not limited to subsidised fodder and feed supplies for livestock, subsidised water supply for agriculture purposes and financial assistance with fodder and water delivery.

### COVID-19

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (19:07): (1609) My matter tonight for the adjournment is for the attention of the Attorney-General, and it relates to the requirement that government agencies and departments act as model litigants. This is a long-established principle. I have been involved in substantial litigation with the Department of Health over the recent period – and other departments, but specifically the Department of Health. What I sought through a freedom of information request were the matters around briefings to the chief health officer concerning the curfew on 2 August 2020. Many of us remember that fateful day. We remember Daniel Andrews standing there in his North Face jacket telling us all that he was acting on health advice. What we discovered was that that was a lie – a flat lie. The FOI sought to find information behind these decisions, and in the end VCAT ordered the release of a document – document 34. Judge English ordered the release of that document. The government appealed that to the Court of Appeal. It was a convincing loss at the Court of Appeal, and the court ordered the release of the document. The document contained damning information. For example, Dr Romanes stated:

... I have not seen any specific written assessment of the requirement for curfew ...

Dr Romanes went on to say:

I note that the Cabinet briefings are not specifically containing a written consideration ...

He sought to sign these orders locking up, in effect, putting under curfew, more than 5 million Victorians across metropolitan Melbourne – about 5.3 million Victorians across metropolitan Melbourne. This was very different from the other circumstances in other states, and Victoria of course had the worst outcomes on the pandemic. We had the highest death rate in Australia, the most economic damage and the longest lockdown in the Western world.

It is a very serious outcome and a reflection of the fact that much of the information, we now learn, was not based on health advice. The definitive point about document 34 and the reason it appears the government fought so hard against its release all the way to the Court of Appeal, the highest court in Victoria, is that this had, in documentary form, statements that showed that it was not based on health advice. It is extraordinary that the government would fight this all the way to the Court of Appeal, sucking up public resources – huge cost – and effectively trying to exhaust the applicant, which in this case was me. What I am seeking from the Attorney-General is an investigation of government FOI efforts to ensure that model litigation approaches are adopted by every government department and agency.

### Drought relief

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (19:11): (1610) My adjournment matter is also for the Minister for Agriculture. As the minister might be aware, there is a drought on at the moment, and many parts of my electorate are extremely dry – in some the worst they have had on record. Last year the government dedicated a \$13.5 million drought relief package. This package included \$5000 for grants, which strengthened on-farm preparedness. This was a co-contribution. It was not just a straight grant; you had to pay money as well. The package included technical decision-making support, whatever that means; one-on-one advice for up to 3 hours; and a dedicated regional drought coordinator, which is just another bureaucrat.

Compare that to South Australia: \$13 million for farm drought relief infrastructure; \$4 million to assist charities just to transport fodder; rebates on the emergency services levy – you might want to think about that one too; \$2.5 million for a mental health strategy; \$1 million for rural financial counselling support; \$3.5 million for supporting rural small businesses; \$3.1 million to assist with culling pests and managing kangaroos; \$4.5 million to support producers with electronic tagging; \$1.4 million to co-invest with councils to upgrade regional standpipes and another \$1.1 million just to upgrade standpipes in the Adelaide Hills; \$500,000 to make bulk water available; \$2 million to support sporting clubs in regional areas; and \$17.4 million for future drought preparedness and resilience programs – and there are plenty more.

Those opposite love to give themselves a big pat on the back about how much they support farmers, despite their package failing into insignificance compared to the South Australian one. Then those opposite go ahead and they want to impose one of the most horrible and heinous tax regimes on rural communities this state has seen. We always hear from those opposite ‘In Victoria equality is non-negotiable’, except when it is not. Many farmers have to negotiate the difficult climatic and market conditions, whereas all those opposite want to negotiate is how much they plan to tax, tax and tax our farmers year on year, because that is what they want to do. There is no equality in the proposed changes to the fire services levy in this state – no equality whatsoever, with farmers paying a 189 per cent increase.

The action that I seek from the minister is pretty simple: provide as much support as you can to farmers and do everything you can to stop the introduction of the horrible changes to the fire services levy, which is going to decimate rural communities and push them further into the ground.

### Nunawading Basketball

**Nick McGowan** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:14): (1611) Minister, it is that time of the evening again. I have come back to the chamber, and I am completely reinvigorated. I am pleased to be here after five weeks of hard work and labour – labour, I would have to emphasise to you, is L-A-O-U-R or thereabouts. I was never great at spelling, but there you go. I had a fantastic five weeks.

We are back in the chamber. We are back at Parliament, and what I want to advocate on behalf of is my beloved basketball association, Nunawading Basketball. I know that this is also something dear to the President’s heart. Today I had the good fortune of meeting with a number of community-minded and dedicated people who do their best to support our club, the Nunawading Spectres, including of course the chair Robert Green, the CEO Mark Hallett and the representative from Basketball Victoria as well Jake Keogh. Anyway, the club are very fortunate that over the course of the election they were the recipients of a future grant in the order of \$45 million. That is not small change; that is reasonably significant, I would say. In addition to that, they also have received a commitment from the local council for a further \$35 million, so that brings them up very near to their total.

What they still need of course is an additional \$25 million. They will be seeking that from this state government. In fact they would have had meetings today – and if not today then certainly they will in the days to come – seeking assurances from this government that they do not have to wait two long years for that support. It would be very, very wrong indeed if that were the case. Two years is a long

time to activate that significant investment that already sits on the table. That period would deny the local constituents in my area the work opportunities that they would have for this next two years, so I would implore this government to take a very close look at what the Nunawading Basketball club are trying to do. I suspect that there is not going to be money in this year's budget; that is probably self-evident. However, there is one more budget before the election. This project should not be delayed until an election – basically the end of next year – thereby making the people of Nunawading wait two whole years before they activate that money.

When the minister is at the cabinet table talking with her colleagues, I hope that she implores this government in the next budget, before the end of next year and before the election is due, to commit the extra \$25 million, which unlocks the \$45 million given from the federal government and the \$35 million promised in the local government and gets the shovel in the ground for local jobs, basketball and kids in sport.

### **Broadmeadows Road–Johnstone Street, Westmeadows**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (19:17): (1612) My adjournment is directed towards the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently investigate what can be done to improve safety at the Johnstone Street and Broadmeadows Road intersection in Westmeadows in my electorate. The current intersection leads to long queues, delays, near misses and even accidents on a daily basis due to the risky turns into oncoming traffic, which is further exacerbated by the 70-kilometre-per-hour speed limit on Broadmeadows Road. This dangerous situation not only disrupts traffic flow but also creates a severe safety hazard for drivers and pedestrians alike.

I know the minister does not often pay attention to the neglectorate of Greenvale in her capacity as Minister for Roads and Road Safety, but I suggest she does, because people are talking about the swing against Labor in the seat of Bendigo but let us not forget that there was an enormous, even bigger, swing against Labor on the primary vote, crashing about 15 per cent, in the federal election in the seat of Calwell, where they have lost 25 per cent in the last 10 years. This is an area that had a 15.5 per cent swing against them on the two-party preferred in the state election, and those trends will continue if the government does not pay attention to communities like Westmeadows in the neglectorate of Greenvale.

Residents of Westmeadows have a right to come and go from their homes without being backed up in the ludicrous traffic we see on a daily basis. The state government continues to ignore it. It continuously misses out on blackspot funding, despite the advocacy of Hume City Council to secure support. Labor have neglected the northern suburbs for far too long. As a result our roads remain poorly funded, forcing residents to face traffic gridlock. We need to upgrade the safety of this intersection in Westmeadows before it is too late. Whether it be a signalised intersection or a roundabout, we need the state government to act now.

I have previously invited the minister to come out with me to the neglectorate of Greenvale, to Westmeadows, to view this intersection for herself at Johnstone Street and Broadmeadows Road. So far that invitation has been ignored. Well, I suspect, with the continuation of the massive swings against the Labor Party in this part of the world, maybe they will come out soon; maybe they will finally pay attention. So I repeat the action: not only my invitation but to investigate what can be done and properly fund an upgrade to this intersection.

### **Local Government Inspectorate**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (19:20): (1613) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General. The action I seek is for the Attorney to outline what steps she will take to strengthen transparency and restore public trust in the reporting of Local Government Inspectorate investigations.

In 2022 Hepburn Shire Council sold Daylesford's Rex Theatre at a nearly \$6 million loss after its redevelopment meant cost blowouts and disputes over the building's condition and scope of works. It caused considerable concern in the local community because of not just the financial losses but also the serious potential governance failures it exposed. Following a 2019 complaint the Local Government Inspectorate launched a long-running investigation, with a leaked draft report raising serious concerns regarding the role of Hepburn council's former CEO, who went on to become Hobsons Bay's CEO in June 2018.

There are numerous calls from across the sector for the official report's release. Hepburn's mayor expressed his frustration that a detailed report will not be released, thereby denying transparency and accountability and undermining the community, councillors and council officers. Hobsons Bay's mayor noted that she wrote to the Attorney about this matter, warning that lack of disclosure exposed her council to 'significant risk' and that it 'undermines public trust'. She highlighted the direct impact on Hobsons Bay's council, which appointed the CEO in question after his employment by Hepburn shire and in the absence of any information release and continued to employ him until this year. The Municipal Association of Victoria's president also supports the call for the report's disclosure, noting that:

Transparency and good governance are essential in local government.

The Local Government Inspectorate has not heeded these calls, claiming there is insufficient evidence to prove to the requisite standard of proof of the commission of any disciplinary breaches or criminal offences contrary to the act. But without the release of detailed findings and with the leaked draft report still casting a long shadow, public confidence remains shaken. While the Attorney may not seek to intervene in individual investigations of the Local Government Inspectorate, their findings should be communicated transparently. The integrity of the oversight system depends on public trust, and presently that is under strain.

### Responses

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (19:23): This evening, in a significant departure from custom and practice, we have seen a grand total of 21 adjournment matters. I take it that on the basis of Mrs McArthur's contribution it was deemed necessary to enable that additional item to be presented such that we could finish on a true high note for this evening. They will be referred to the relevant ministers in accordance with the standing orders for response.

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

**House adjourned 7:23 pm.**