



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Thursday 2 April 2026**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

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

**Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024 to 28 January 2026)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

**Leader of the Nationals**

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### 60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John <sup>8</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim <sup>9</sup>	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan <sup>10</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam <sup>5</sup>	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam <sup>6,7</sup>	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>11</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel <sup>12</sup>	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 13 February 2026

<sup>6</sup> Greens until 1 November 2024

<sup>7</sup> Resigned 23 November 2024

<sup>8</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 6 January 2025

<sup>10</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>11</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

<sup>12</sup> Sworn in 4 March 2025

#### Party abbreviations

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

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**Thursday 2 April 2026**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.**

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I understand that in relation to constituency questions and adjournments there are rules that explain and guide the questions members may ask. Those rules are sometimes within the standing orders and sessional orders, and others are rulings from the Chair, some of which are hard and fast and some of which are grey. When a constituency question or adjournment is knocked out, the only losers are Victorians, because these questions are based on community concerns and issues. I would like to raise my concern that perhaps there is a strictness on every occasion to the substance of constituency questions and adjournments. Unfortunately I think there is latitude that could be given, which perhaps is not being given, and as I said, the only losers are Victorians. So I would put to you, Speaker, in relation to the substance of constituency questions and adjournments, that at times there are opportunities to provide a little bit of latitude, and I would hope and put to the house that perhaps a little bit of latitude could be given in relation to those matters.

**The SPEAKER:** I will take that advice from the member for Brighton and give it consideration.

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

**The SPEAKER (09:36):** General business, notices of motion 5 to 6, 27 and 73 and order of the day 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

***Documents*****Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

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

*Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* – Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Statutory Rule 21 under the *Wrongs Act 1958*

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 19.

***Motions*****Motions by leave**

**Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:36):** I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Cranbourne for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan’s reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:37):** I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Leader of the Opposition was sold as a fresh start, yet her party is now in chaos, factional warfare has broken out and they are under the shadow of One Nation.

**Leave refused.**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (09:37): I move by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ashwood for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Victorian Liberal Party struggles not only to win elections but to keep candidates, with resignations and withdrawals a more consistent feature than any coherent policy platform.

**Leave refused.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Oakleigh for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in his electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 train stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Victorian Liberal Party continues to promise change, but the only change they are delivering is the constant cycling of their members and their candidates.

**Leave refused.**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Wendouree for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Victorian Liberal Party has changed leader seven times since 2012 and recognises instability is not an episode for the Liberals but their defining feature.

**Leave refused.**

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Frankston for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Victorian Liberals approved a \$1.55 million arrangement tied to the member for Hawthorn's defamation loss and condemns them for turning their party room into a factional legal defence fund.

**Leave refused.**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Werribee for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house notes Jeff Kennett once denounced Pauline Hanson's intolerant views and urged the Liberals to put One Nation last and condemns the hypocrisy of those now flirting with her politics, including – who is it – Jeff Kennett, who is now calling on the opposition leader to form a grand coalition with the Nationals and with One Nation.

**Leave refused.**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bentleigh for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for offering Victorians not a credible alternative but a rolling spectacle of spills, lawsuits, censorship, candidate failures and a drift to the populist right.

**Leave refused.**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (09:41): I move, by leave:

This house condemns the member for Eureka for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house notes it is a farce to be lectured on housing affordability by a member who owns more than 15 properties while the opposition offers no serious plan to support Victorian renters.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Sunbury for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the opposition cannot govern itself, let alone Victoria, given its ongoing internal division, lack of strategy and reliance on stale talking points that fail to reflect how frontline services actually operate.

**Leave refused.**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Melton for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Shadow Attorney-General has spent more time raising points of order than advancing an argument, suggesting his contributions are as thin as his colleagues' patience.

**Leave refused.**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bayswater for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the only thing the Victorian Liberals can deliver is a consistent change of leadership and members.

**Leave refused.**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Mulgrave for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Geelong for failing to demand PSOs remain at train stations in her electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Liberals candidate for the upper house had to withdraw for giving a good character reference to someone who was charged with child sex offences, and I ask the Leader of the Opposition: why was this allowed to happen?

**Leave refused.**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the ever absent member for Tarneit for failing to demand PSOs remain at local train stations in their electorate and for refusing to oppose Premier Allan's reckless plan to strip PSOs from 120 stations during a crime crisis.

**Leave refused.**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the continued absence of the Manager of Opposition Business from the chamber this week, which explains why he has failed to see all the time that Labor has dedicated to talking about the cost of living.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Brighton is warned.

**Leave refused.**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Education sitting at the table right now for failing to respect and value Victorian teachers by securing a fair pay deal due to a decade of Labor's financial recklessness, leading to industrial action impacting teachers, students, parents and carers.

**Leave refused.**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the phrase 'cost of living' has been said over 50 times this week in this chamber and that the member for Brighton has only said it once, outside the chamber preaching to the media.

**Leave refused.**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house requires the Minister for Government Services to amend the Victorian licence plate to read 'Victoria, not the Education State', reflecting Labor's 12 years of failure, a prototype of which I make available to the house and to the minister.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Sandringham, that is not appropriate.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (09:47): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 5 May 2026.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Melbourne Airport rail link**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:48): Works are back on track for Melbourne Airport rail stage 1, bringing my community closer to a train station for the people of Airport West, Keilor Park and East Keilor. The Labor governments of Anthony Albanese and Jacinta Allan have delivered over \$4 billion in investment. But this is about more than tracks and trains; it is about people. It is about more time with family, more time with communities and a real, tangible opportunity to get communities that have been car-dependent for generations onto Victoria's public transport system.

Sunshine station is set to become a true transport superhub, handling more than 1000 trains a day, linking our community to the Metro Tunnel, regional Victoria and of course Melbourne Airport. This will be a major gateway out in Melbourne's west. The community, though, continue to ask: what comes next? Well, what I can say is we will go to a turn-up-and-go train system out in Melbourne's western suburbs. We know the people of Brimbank, Moonee Valley, Airport West, Keilor East and Keilor Park have long called for a turn-up-and-go system where they can go not only to the CBD but to the Melbourne Airport as well. We know that so much of the workforce lives and resides in Melbourne's western suburbs. I am really proud, because I know Melbourne's west does deserve a world-class public transport system, and that is what our Labor government will do. It will electrify the north-west. It was wonderful to have the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the community just recently to celebrate and mark the milestone of airport rail getting back on track.

### Rural and regional women's health

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (09:49): The Allan Labor government claims it is improving access to women's health, but for women in south-west Victoria, the reality tells a very different story. We hear the announcements and see the glossy brochures, yet the lived experience exposes a widening gap between propaganda and reality. Take Marie from Portland. After noticing changes in her health, she travelled hundreds of kilometres to Melbourne to attend the Jean Hailes foundation menopause clinic, a nationally respected leader in women's health. Like many rural patients, she relied upon the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme, which is meant to help and support those forced to travel to specialist care. But Marie was deemed ineligible because, get this, menopause specialists are not recognised under the scheme. Why? Because eligibility is still tied to an outdated definition from the Health Insurance Act 1973, legislation more than 50 years old. Our understanding of women's health has evolved, but the system has not. This is the Premier's contradiction: a government claiming to modernise women's health while relying on policies that fail to recognise it. Recent reports confirm what regional communities already know: that services are harder to access, costs are higher and support systems do not reflect the reality outside Melbourne. If this government is serious, it must move beyond announcements and update the rules that determine access, because rural women's health care should not depend on where they live.

### Easter

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:51): Easter is a significant time of reflection, renewal and hope for many people across Victoria. For members of the Christian faith, it is a sacred period marking sacrifice, compassion and new beginnings. It is also a moment for all of us to reflect on the values that bring communities together – values like kindness, service and support for one another. It is also a time when many give back to their communities through volunteering and providing food relief. I want to acknowledge the many churches and faith communities across my electorate, with this time being of critical importance to them. I thank them for their contribution and wish all those observing Easter a blessed and peaceful weekend.

### Orthodox Easter

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:52): I want to take this time to acknowledge the many different Orthodox Christians across my community who will soon be observing Easter. Easter is a significant time of reflection, renewal and hope for many people across Victoria. For many Orthodox Christians across my electorate, it is a sacred period that marks sacrifice, compassion and new beginnings. It is a moment for all of us to reflect on the values that strengthen our community – values such as kindness, service and support for one another. I want to acknowledge the many constituents across the electorate who will be observing Orthodox Easter on the weekend of 12 April this year, as well as their churches and faith communities who will be providing important guidance during this time. I thank them for the important contribution they make to our community and wish all of those celebrating a blessed, peaceful and joyous Easter.

### Crime

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:53): In Mildura and across Sunraysia in the Mallee, we are proud, resilient communities, but right now people are feeling increasingly uneasy for various reasons. I have spoken to small business owners who are dealing with repeat theft and damage, often absorbing the costs themselves because it is simply not worth reporting it anymore. I have heard from families who no longer feel comfortable letting their kids walk home from sport or school, and I have spoken to frontline workers – retail staff, police members, healthcare workers, volunteers – who are coping abuse as part of their everyday working lives. This is not abstract. It is not statistics; it is real, and it is happening every single day in our communities. At the same time, people in the regions feel like they

are being overlooked and underestimated. When crime happens in Melbourne, it makes headlines. When it happens in Mildura, Robinvale, Beulah, small towns out in the Mallee, it is just another day.

Yesterday I asked the Premier about victims of crime and she said she is listening. Well, Premier, listening is not enough. Over this Easter break, I would encourage you to take time to watch the documentary produced by Big Chocky featuring the parents of Aidan Becker. It is a powerful piece of cinema and documentary, because if you truly want to understand the impact of crime in this state – not just the statistics and the data and not just the briefings, but the human cost – then you need to hear directly from those living it. Only then might you begin to grasp how Victoria's crime crisis is affecting everyday Australians.

### **Public transport fares**

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (09:54): Residents of my community are telling me that with rising fuel prices their household budgets are under significant pressure. While as a state government we cannot control global oil prices or indeed overseas conflicts, we are committed to doing what we can to take pressure off household budgets when people need it most. That is why, for the month of April, public transport is free across Victoria on every train, tram and bus – metro and regional. For families in my community in Dandenong, that means real savings. It means students getting to TAFE or university with money to spare for food. It means parents getting to go to work and being able to have an option to leave the car at home, leaving more money for them to pay the bills that are stacking up on the kitchen table. It builds on Labor's introduction of free public transport for kids under the age of 18, which is already saving families up to \$755 per child per year. Importantly, it also helps take cars off the road, easing congestion on key local routes like Princes Highway and the Monash in my local community, which benefits those who still need to drive, including tradies, for example, and local businesses transporting goods around the area. This builds on the significant amount of work the Allan Labor government has been doing to ease cost-of-living pressures for families. We are focused on the community, not like those opposite, who are focused on each other and themselves.

### **Teachers**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (09:56): Our teachers are wonderful people. They value education and help nurture the potential in our children and young people. I pay tribute to the hardworking and dedicated teachers that educate students at schools in my community – thank you. You achieve strong educational results with very little resources. Yet under the Allan Labor government Victorian teachers are the lowest paid in the nation, and their workplaces, state schools, are the lowest funded in the nation. Our teachers deserve to be valued more, not less. Our teachers deserve a fair pay rise, yet after a decade of financial mismanagement Labor cannot afford to negotiate in good faith. Debt is skyrocketing, and interest repayments on Labor's debt are costing taxpayers \$1 million an hour. That is money that cannot be spent on a pay rise for teachers. Corruption on Labor's Big Build projects has resulted in \$15 billion lining the pockets of criminals and bikies. That is money that cannot be spent on a pay rise for teachers. Teachers are frustrated, and it should not be this way. Too many are quitting the profession or leaving Victoria to teach in Queensland or New South Wales, and we must do more to keep them here. How can Labor say we are the Education State if they keep paying teachers the lowest in Australia? I share teachers' concerns and call on the government to value and pay teachers more so that they can get on with what they are good at and love doing: teaching our young kids.

### **Cire Services**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (09:57): On educational excellence in my community, I wish to congratulate Cire on its 50-year anniversary.

### **International Women's Day**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:57): Last month we celebrated International Women's Day in my electorate with my eighth annual International Women's

Day schools forum, bringing together local primary and secondary schools. Fourteen schools joined us alongside local community leaders, including the member for Cranbourne and the member for Mordialloc and our outstanding guest speaker Katya Crema. Katya inspired us with her own story, from building a successful career and business across construction, architecture, property and sustainability to representing Australia at two Winter Olympic Games in ski cross and most recently serving as deputy chef de mission at the Milano Cortina winter games. Thank you to Carrum Downs Secondary College for hosting us, especially Louise Burley for her support, and all the other schools for participating: Patterson River Secondary College, Flinders Christian Community College, Seaford Park Primary, Seaford North Primary, Kananook Primary, Monterey Secondary College, John Paul College and Casey Grammar.

I had the pleasure of welcoming two incredible local leaders, Karen Gray and Lia Delagas from Skye United Football Club, to Parliament's International Women's Day event. To Karen and Lia and to all the women who play, coach, volunteer and lead in our community sport: thank you. You are making a real difference in our community every day.

### **Carrum Primary School**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:58): Congratulations to the fabulous 2026 Carrum Primary School captains Astin Garas and Ivy Quinn. We are so very proud of you. You are incredible role models.

### **Shepparton electorate public transport**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (09:59): It is a really distressing time with the uncertainty of the current fuel crisis. Whilst this government encourages the use of public transport and is offering it for free, public transport should be a cost-of-living measure available for all communities. But my electorate already has insufficient bus and train services and is already experiencing overcrowding. We have parts of my electorate with minimal or no bus services. This has been an ongoing issue and is something that our local bus companies, our local council, the community and I have been calling on the Minister for Public and Active Transport to address. It has been over 16 years since we have had a bus review, and during that time our region has grown, as has the need for increased transport services.

Regional Victoria is very different to the city. We do not have trams or the volume of services. People need to get to where they need to go, whether that be to work, to a medical appointment or to TAFE. I had Dr Chik Sing Chua contact me just this past week calling for public bus services for his patients. The recent completion of the Shepparton line upgrade was to take the daily train services from Shepparton to Melbourne from five to nine. That still has not happened. Overcrowding on the train has seen many commuters not able to get a seat. The government makes an announcement without the services to support it. Cost-of-living pressure is already pushing families to the limit, and we know that with the increased cost of fuel, people are cutting back on food and struggling to pay their bills and keep a roof over their head. Regional communities deserve to be supported not only during these challenging times but every single day.

### **Cathy Connop**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (10:00): In 1989 Bob Hawke was the Prime Minister of Australia and John Cain was the Premier of Victoria, and for the very first time Cathy Connop walked through the doors of Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre. Today is Cathy's last day. Cathy has just been inspirational. She has been a leader in our community. She has opened the doors to people who have felt locked out, people who have had a mental illness, people who were newly arrived asylum seekers, people who have lost connections with family and friends and people who have missed out on the opportunity of an education.

Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre is a warm, welcoming, inviting place, and it has been because of Cathy's leadership, her stewardship and her vision that it has been the thing that it has been and has achieved so many great things in my community. Cathy has just been focused and driven. She has put the community before herself at every step of the way, and as a consequence of the sacrifices Cathy has made over 37 years, she has made Flemington a richer, brighter, warmer, more welcoming and safer place. Cathy, I just cannot thank you enough for everything that you have done for our community. There are so many people walking around the streets of Flemington today and in the inner north-west who lead richer lives because of you. Thank you, Cathy.

#### **Government performance**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (10:02): In Victoria the government has been good at wasting taxpayer money. We have had \$15 billion on CFMEU corruption and waste, \$600 million on the Commonwealth Games – and more. Soon we will have a bronze statue of Daniel Andrews. Yet before they do that, perhaps this government should not ignore the contribution of a Premier well before Daniel Andrews who was a former Mornington representative and who helped to build the foundations of this state. That is Sir James McCulloch, who originally represented the Wimmera, where I grew up, but then represented Mornington from 1862 to 1872 and served as Premier across four terms between 1863 and 1877. He served for well over 3000 days and is Victoria's third-longest serving Premier, but he to this day still has no statue. We should not be wasting money on newer premiers like Daniel Andrews when we do not have a statue to this day of our third-longest serving Premier. He was indeed a leader of substance at the time, and he led a government that ruled almost continuously until 1871, making genuine land policy and other reforms and much more. But this is in contrast with this government, which continues to waste money. That occurred under the former Premier and continues under this Premier. Let us not continue to waste money on statues, CFMEU corruption, Commonwealth Games and more.

#### **Workshops Pier, Williamstown**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:03): It was a hive of activity and the excitement was palpable down at the Williamstown waterfront last Wednesday when we reopened the Workshops Pier at Seaworks, which is now fully upgraded and restored. Built in 1942, the pier remains a defining part of Williamstown maritime history, and now the heritage fleet has got a new home here – with an early look at how seamlessly the enterprise fits into that space. Thanks to Glenn Jones and the team at Seaworks, and thank you to the Minister for Environment for joining me to celebrate.

#### **Jawbone Marine Sanctuary**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:04): After that, the minister and I also visited what is contentiously known – or that creates some controversy – as either 'the Crystal', 'the Crystals' or 'the Crystal Pool' at Willy beach, along with Kate Robinson from the Snorkel Sisters and the Jawbone Marine Sanctuary Care Group. Our community is calling for the Jawbone Marine Sanctuary to be expanded to include the 'Crystals' as it is a unique and valued spot that locals want to see protected, and a community petition has attracted almost 6000 signatures.

#### **Anzac Day**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:04): Finally, I am pleased to say that Williamstown's Anzac Day dawn service will proceed thanks to the determination of Dave Boxshall and Ian Nicholls. Thank you both for making sure that this important event continues to attract Williamstown locals by the thousands to commemorate those who have fallen.

**Rowville electorate crime**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (10:05): This statement condemns the Allan Labor government and the Minister for Police for their continued failure to protect the Victorian community from the record crime crisis seen across the state. The recently released crime stats for the year to December 2025 reveal not only that Victorians are less safe than they ever have been before, with criminal offending reaching a new all-time high under Labor, but also concerning increases to the number of serious offences categories locally within the Rowville electorate. Rowville has experienced a disturbing 44.7 per cent rise in breach of family violence orders and a serious 25 per cent increase in motor vehicle theft. Concerningly, Lysterfield has seen a 21 per cent increase in the breach of family violence, while aggravated burglaries have skyrocketed by 116 per cent, and Wantirna South has seen a substantial 27 per cent increase in breach of family violence orders and a significant 14 per cent rise in motor vehicle theft. What is upsetting is that the Allan Labor government in last year's budget cut Victoria's police funding, forcing a serious reduction in opening hours of Rowville police station, which is now only open two days per week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 10 am and 6 pm. The Allan Labor government must urgently provide Victoria Police additional resources to restore the opening hours at Rowville and other police stations before it is too late.

**Macleod Park pavilion**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:06): Junior footy and cricket in Macleod have a new home-ground advantage with the completion of a new pavilion at Macleod Park, a \$4.3 million redevelopment which included \$1.82 million from the Allan Labor government. It is home to some 550 junior players from the Eagles football and cricket teams, and previously the ageing pavilion was really struggling to cope with that growing demand. I was really pleased to join the team there at the opening for both the junior football and cricket teams. Also as the father of a 2023 under-12 girls premiership player I was very pleased to join so many families and the volunteers that make it happen. The new pavilion includes four player and two official rooms with amenities suitable for women and girls, accessible public amenities, a social room, a kitchen, a timekeeper's room, an office and storage space. There are also new viewing areas that are quite spectacular, and it is a fully accessible building that has got a lift and all. It is going to be great for activities there at Macleod Park for junior football and for cricket.

**Macleod level crossing removals**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:07): Just right next door we have released the designs now for the new rail bridge in Macleod, which will remove the dangerous and congested Ruthven Street level crossing. That is a new rail bridge to improve safety and ease congestion for some 12,500 drivers who use that crossing every day. When completed next year, that will eliminate some 30 minutes of boom gate downtime at Ruthven Street in Macleod.

**Rental reform**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (10:08): Jackie lives in Fitzroy with two housemates, a broken dishwasher and black mould. In her last two rentals Jackie raised maintenance issues and both times it followed with rent increases that she could not afford. Now she is in her third rental in as many years. She does not want to move again, so she keeps quiet. Like Jackie, 80 per cent of Victorian renters avoid asking for basic repairs and maintenance for fear of retaliation, and 52 per cent of renters state that their homes fail to meet minimum standards. Now, it is all very well to have legislated minimum standards: we need them. But if enforcement continues to rely on renters taking property investors to court in an inherently unfair power dynamic, nothing will change. We need rent controls and we need independent enforcement of minimum standards to take the burden off renters and make renting fair. We need rentworthy checks for a property before it is listed so we know that it meets minimum standards before the renter moves in, we need a landlord licensing scheme and we need a register with

penalties and revocation for serious and multiple breaches. Until then renters will continue to live in unfair, insecure and unaffordable housing.

### **Tamil Seniors Social Club**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:09): I rise today to recognise the outstanding contribution of the Mill Park Tamil Seniors Social Club and one of its most dedicated members, Mr Aruleeswaran. Led by president Kulasingam, known as Kula, the club is a vibrant and active organisation in Melbourne's northern suburbs and continues to foster leadership, connection and community participation. Importantly, the club plays a vital role in promoting multiculturalism, bringing people together in a spirit of inclusion, respect and shared understanding. The heart of this organisation is Mr Aruleeswaran, a 92-year-old pillar of Victoria's Tamil community. After migrating to Australia in the early 1990s from his war-torn homeland, he sought to rebuild not just his life but a sense of community for others. Recognising the need for support among Tamil seniors in the north, he founded the organisation in July 2002. In its earliest days, when facilities were limited, gatherings were held in members' homes. Mr Aruleeswaran and his wife prepared meals, organised transport and ensured that every member felt welcomed and connected. For more than three decades he has given tirelessly to the community, serving as treasurer, president and vice-president and, despite health challenges, continues to mentor others today, with the club growing in number from 16 members originally through to more than 135 today. Mr Aruleeswaran is an inspiring example of service, strength and the commitment of multicultural communities in Victoria. I commend the Mill Park Tamil Seniors Social Club and thank Mr Aruleeswaran for his remarkable contribution.

### **Bushfire recovery**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (10:10): I need to share the story of Peter and Lindsey. At 75 years old they lost their home and property in the Longwood bushfire in January. Everything they had built over a lifetime was destroyed, and like many in our community they made the really hard decision that they did not have the time, the energy or the patience to rebuild from scratch and found another home to try and move forward with some dignity. They reached out to the State Revenue Office and asked for something as reasonable as stamp duty exemption. After losing everything in a bushfire, they were rejected. They were told by the SRO to apply for a first home buyers grant – at 75 years old. This is the reality of support being offered by the Allan Labor government in regional Victoria right now. A couple who have worked their entire lives, paid their taxes and contributed to our community are being told that there is nothing for them. It is tone deaf, it is heartless and it is completely out of touch. The January bushfires are on track to be remembered as the moment Labor governments turned their backs on regional Victorians when we needed it most. Across our entire fire-affected region the response has failed to meet even the most basic precedents set in past disasters – no meaningful business support, no business concessional loans, no stamp duty relief for those affected and trying to start again, no rate relief and not even the postponement of the emergency services tax. Right now the only temporary housing offered is a caravan. To add insult to injury, even the mental health support that was announced did not service our region. The impact of these failures will be felt for generations.

### **Greek Independence Day**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:12): Australia's multicultural community and diversity is our strength, and it is something that Labor will always support. In two world wars Australia formed a bond with Greece that is unbreakable. We fought side by side, and since the end of the Second World War, Australia has welcomed so many Greeks who have chosen to make this country their home, a country that embraces and encourages people to retain their cultural heritage. The connection and bond between our two countries remains as strong today as ever. Thousands from our local Greek communities celebrated Greek Independence Day and paid their respects at the shrine

to honour all those who fought for freedom and democracy in 1821. I would like to recognise everyone in my community who continues to embrace and be proud of their cultural heritage.

### **Polish Community Care Services**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:13): I offer my congratulations to PolCare, Polish Community Care Services, for their recent 10th anniversary of providing first-class, community-based care and support to older Polish Australians, their carers and those with a disability. That is a decade of real care and commitment, although they have been going for many more years than that. I was very proud to join this amazing organisation recently to celebrate at their home in Mount Waverley. I thank them for all they do and wish them continued success in the incredible work they do helping so many thousands of Polish Australians.

### **Holi Festival of Colours**

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:13): There is nothing much better than a local Indian community festival, and that was certainly true of the Rang Barse Festival of Colours at Brickmakers Park in Oakleigh to celebrate Holi. I had such an incredible welcome, with so much colour and smiles everywhere. There was an amazing display of culture, joy and unity, and it was a testament to the strength of our diversity and our multicultural community here in Victoria.

### **Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:13): I rise to congratulate the Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan OAM, the Abbot of Quang Minh Temple, on being named citizen of the year at the City of Maribyrnong 2026 Civic Awards. Venerable Tan is a pillar of our community, and his recognition is well deserved and well respected. Just yesterday I was proud to welcome the Quang Minh Temple community, including the Venerable Tan, here to Parliament. Venerable Tan arrived in Australia as a refugee in 1981 and has led the Quang Minh Temple since 1997. In that time he has become the most significant leader for the Vietnamese and Buddhist community in Victoria. Under his leadership we have seen millions of dollars donated to health care, disaster relief and humanitarian causes, including donating towards the new Footscray Hospital and of course the Joan Kirner Women and Children's Hospital. He has acted to help victims of earthquakes and natural disasters. He serves as vice-president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, and every single week he provides meditation, spiritual guidance and support to all members of our community. Thank you, Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan, for all that you do for our community in the west.

### **Craigieburn Festival**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:15): It was a pleasure to join the Craigieburn community at this year's Craigieburn Festival, which continues to be one of our region's most vibrant and well-loved local events. The festival brought together families, volunteers, community groups and local businesses in a true celebration of everything that makes our area such a dynamic and welcoming place to live. I thank everyone that stopped past to have a chat to me, the member for Greenvale and the federal member for Calwell. From cultural performances to children's activities and the many stallholders who showcased their work, the community's diversity shone throughout the day, so it was fitting that the festival was held on Harmony Day.

### **Harmony Day**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:16): I was also pleased that I had the opportunity to enjoy a coffee catch-up for Harmony Day and Cultural Diversity Week with members

of our wonderfully diverse community. Harmony Day reminds us of the richness of our multicultural communities, and sharing stories over a simple cup of coffee reinforced our collective pride in living in a place where respect, inclusivity and belonging shape everyday life. I particularly thank Nikkie Jag Sharma for her initiative and leadership in organising this gathering.

### **Assyrian New Year**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (10:16): This past Sunday was the Assyrian New Year festival for the year 6776. The celebration brought together families and community leaders to mark an important cultural tradition. I am very pleased that the Premier was able to attend and make a significant announcement of up to \$10 million to establish St Joseph's Christian college, which will provide families in our growing northern corridor with greater access to local education, and I thank the member for Greenvale for his tireless work in championing this issue.

### **Easter**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:17): I would like to say happy Easter to everyone in Cranbourne and across Victoria. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank our Christian faith leaders for the role that they play. I would also like to acknowledge that the Easter message of peace and new beginnings is particularly important at this time.

### **Bailey Ogden**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:17): On another matter, there is a lot going on in Cranbourne. I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Bailey Ogden on being the Young Citizen of the Year for the City of Casey, a wonderful young man who has been working so hard with the BATS Theatre Company in so many ways and bringing so much joy to our community.

### **Nowruz**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:17): Happy Nowruz. I hope that the new year ahead brings you joy, health and prosperity.

### **Sikh community**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:17): Finally, on another matter, there has been a lot going on, and I would like to wish our Sikh community happy Vaisakhi. Thank you for all you do to support our Australian community. I express my gratitude for the work to bring unity, equality and hard work to our great state. Thank you as always to the amazing Sikh volunteers for all that they do. It was wonderful to spend time in Langwarrin again last weekend. Any time that is spent with the Sikh volunteers leaves my heart filled with joy, acknowledging of course the young people as they are growing and taking on leadership positions in the Sikh community and people of the Sikh faith, who come together in so many different ways but particularly at times of floods and fires, always going towards people who need help.

### **Bills**

#### **Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026**

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:19): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the *Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026* (the **Bill**).

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

### **Overview of the Bill**

The main purposes of this Bill are to amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (**Principal Act**):

- a) to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the early childhood education, school education, vocational education and training and adult, community and further education system;
- b) to provide for the collection and disclosure of information about an applicant for registration under Part 2.6 of that Act;
- c) in relation to interim suspensions under Part 2.6 of that Act;
- d) in relation to the Register of Registered Teachers (**Registration Register**) and the Register of Disciplinary Action (**Discipline Register**);
- e) to impose a penalty for certain false representations concerning former registration as a teacher or permission to teach;
- f) in relation to the Student Register under Part 5.3A of that Act;
- g) in relation to the appointment of the Chairperson of the Council of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (**VIT**);
- h) to remove the requirement for an investigator conducting a health assessment of a registered teacher to report to the VIT in certain circumstances;
- i) to require schools to develop policies to restrict student use of personal electronic devices during school hours; and
- j) to make other minor and consequential amendments to that Act.

The Bill also amends the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* to make a statute law revision amendment.

### **Human Rights Issues**

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- Right to equality and protection from discrimination (section 8)
- Right to privacy (section 13(a))
- Right to freedom of expression (section 15(2))
- Protection of families and children (section 17)
- Cultural rights of Aboriginal persons (section 19);
- Right to property (section 20); and
- Right to a fair hearing (section 24(1))

### ***Amendments to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination***

The Bill makes a number of amendments to the Principal Act that directly relate to Aboriginal people and are designed to strengthen recognition and self-determination across the early childhood education, school education, vocational education and training and adult, community and further education system:

- *Definition of 'parent'*: Clause 4 amends the definition of 'parent' to expressly include persons with parental responsibility for a child according to Aboriginal Lore and law. While the current definition of 'parent' is broad and inclusive in nature and arguably already captures family structures under Aboriginal kinship systems, this amendment puts this beyond doubt;
- *Statement of recognition*: Clause 5 inserts a new Part 1.1A. This Part makes provision for a statement of recognition which recognise the unique status and rights of Aboriginal people, acknowledge past and ongoing injustices experienced by Aboriginal people in Victoria, and the aspiration of Aboriginal people to have increased autonomy and decision-making through the Treaty process. This is similar to other recognition provisions in other Victorian legislation and is primarily symbolic in nature, noting the operation of section 1.1A.3 which limits the legal consequences of the Part;
- *Decision-making principles*: Clause 5 also inserts Part 1.1B. This Part includes section 1.1B.1, which requires persons employed or engaged in the education and training system to have regard to and apply new principles to strengthen Aboriginal recognition, self-determination and outcomes in the education and training system when making decisions or actions in relation to the provision or administration of

education or training. The principles are intended to operate in addition to the existing principles in Part 1.2 of the Principal Act, and a failure to have regard to the principles is not intended to result in legal consequences;

- *Consultation duty:* Clause 19 inserts section 5.3.2A, which requires the Secretary to the Department of Education or Secretary to Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (as applicable) to consult with representatives of the Aboriginal community when developing or implementing relevant strategies, policies or system-level educational or targets that impact or could impact, or otherwise relate to, the education outcomes of Aboriginal people;
- *Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training:* Clause 30 inserts new section 5.3.2B, which requires the Secretary to the Department of Education and the Secretary to the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions to make professional development training on available to a range of persons and institutions in the education and training system. Professional development training includes training in the areas of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives; working with Aboriginal communities; supporting the learning and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal people; and supporting Aboriginal self-determination and cultural rights;
- *Enshrining that Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives form part of the learning area specified in Schedule 1 as a whole:* Clause 5 amends the Principal Act to provide that Aboriginal histories, cultures (including languages) and perspectives form part of the learning areas specified in Schedule 1 as a whole. Clause 24 inserts a note at the end of the list of learning areas noting this new section inserted by clause 5. This confirms the current practice that Aboriginal histories, cultures (including languages) and perspectives form a part of the Victorian curriculum and further recognises and elevates its significance as a part of the Victorian curriculum for all registered schools.

These amendments are a direct response to the hearings, findings and recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission (**Commission**) in relation to First Peoples' experiences in Victoria's education and training system as detailed in *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report (Volume 3)*. The Commission concluded that First Peoples children are being failed by the Victorian schooling system, and that current day educational inequality is part of a pattern of inequality that has been a feature of life since colonisation. To address this inequity, the Commission recommended that the Principal Act be amended to enable a more inclusive and culturally safe education system and to ensure First Peoples' cultural rights are taken seriously across all schools and early childhood services.

These amendments together promote the rights to equality and protection from discrimination, the rights to protection of families and children and cultural rights of Aboriginal persons.

#### *Right to equality and protection from discrimination*

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter relevantly provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. 'Discrimination' under the Charter is defined by reference to the definition in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* on the basis of an attribute in section 6 of that Act, which relevantly includes race. The purpose of this component of the right to equality is to ensure that all laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect.

The measures outlined above are directed to ensuring Aboriginal peoples' equal enjoyment of human rights, including the rights of families and children and cultural rights (as discussed further below), and to overcome discrimination, working to ensure that Aboriginal people can have access to the same educational and training opportunities as other Victorians.

In particular, the amendments to the definition of 'parent' expressly recognise Aboriginal kinship relationships, and to that extent, mitigate against discrimination on the basis of a person's Aboriginal identity and cultural practice and ensure the equal treatment of parents in Aboriginal families as compared to other Victorian parents under the provisions of the Principal Act. The principles in new section 1.1B.1, inserted by clause 5, also work to provide protection from discrimination by requiring decision-makers to consider and take steps to support the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal people in education and overcome racism and educational inequalities experienced by Aboriginal people.

#### *Protection of families and children*

Section 17(1) of the Charter provides that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the State. The right is principally concerned with unity of family. 'Family' in this context has a broad meaning that encompasses the diversity of families living within Victoria, not only those recognised by formal marriage or cohabitation. The right in s 17(1) is related to s 13(a) of the Charter,

which relevantly provides that every person has the right not to be subject to unlawful or arbitrary interferences with their family.

Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child. This right recognises the special vulnerability of children, and requires the state to adopt social, cultural and economic measures to protect children to foster their development and education. The scope of the right is informed by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

The above amendments together work to improve cultural safety, provide greater recognition of Aboriginal perspectives and increase self-determination, with the aim to minimise barriers to Aboriginal families and students in the education and training system and support access for Aboriginal people to education and training opportunities and improved outcomes. These measures promote the rights of the child, fostering not just the development and education of Aboriginal children, but also providing greater understanding for all Victorian children of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives across all learning areas.

The amendments to the definition of 'parent' which expressly recognise Aboriginal kinship relationships also promote the protection of Aboriginal families under section 17(1) of the Charter.

#### *Cultural rights*

Section 19(1) of the Charter provides that all persons with a particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background must not be denied the right, in community with other persons of that background, to enjoy their culture, declare and practise their religion, and use their language. Section 19(2) of the Charter further provides specific protection for Aboriginal persons, providing that they must not be denied the right, with other members of their community, to enjoy their identity and culture, maintain and use their language, maintain kinship ties, and maintain their distinct spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The rights in s 19 are intended to protect and promote the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity of Victorian society. The rights are concerned not only with the preservation of the cultural, religious and linguistic identity of particular cultural groups, but also with their continued development.

The Bill advances a number of distinct cultural rights, including by the express recognition of cultural rights under the new principles and in the Statement of Recognition; recognising and embedding Aboriginal histories, cultures (including languages) and perspectives in education and training under the new principles, through the consultation duty, by imposing a duty to provide Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training and recognising familial institutions under Aboriginal Lore and law in the amendment to the definition of 'parent'.

#### *Collection and disclosure of information by the VIT in relation to an applicant*

Clause 8 of the Bill amends section 2.6.21B of the Principal Act which deals with the disclosure and collection of information by the VIT. Currently, sections 2.6.21B(1), (2) and (3) of the Principal Act allows the VIT to collect and disclose information to various entities for specified purposes in respect of a registered teacher or former registered teacher, or a provider of a program, unit or course of study. Relevant bodies include any State, Territory or Commonwealth Government department or public authority, any municipal council, or a former or current employer of a registered teacher. Clause 8 expands the operation of this section to allow the VIT to collect and disclose information to these bodies in relation to an applicant for registration under sections 2.6.7 and 2.6.12A and an applicant for permission to teach under section 2.6.13.

The relevant purposes for which information can be disclosed or collected in relation to an applicant are those already applying under section 2.6.21B(4), being where the disclosure or collection is reasonably necessary for, or to enable, the VIT to perform its functions or duties, or exercise its powers, or reasonably necessary for a number of purposes including regulating and registering teachers and early childhood teachers and promoting the safety and wellbeing of a child or group of children.

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. The right to privacy has been interpreted broadly by the courts to include protection of a person's personal information, their physical and psychological integrity, their individual and social identity and their autonomy and inherent dignity. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

This clause interferes with the right to privacy by enabling the sharing of information, which may include sensitive personal information about applicants, such as health information or

information relating to criminal records. However, any interference is lawful, as it is authorised under legislation. Further, interferences with privacy are not arbitrary, as the clause is appropriately tailored to achieve the legitimate purpose of ensuring the VIT has all relevant information when assessing applications, ultimately protecting vulnerable persons such as children. Without this amendment, the VIT may have to rely solely on an applicant's account of the circumstances surrounding offending or professional misconduct, hampering VIT's ability to properly assess any risk to the safety and wellbeing of children which may arise by approving an application.

Further, the existing provision includes a number of safeguards to ensure interferences with privacy do not go beyond what is necessary to achieve that purpose. In particular, where information is disclosed to an employer or former employer, that entity must collect, store and use the information in a way that protects the privacy of the persons to whom the information relates and must not use the information disclosed other than for the purpose for which it was disclosed. Further, where a receiving body is subject to any secrecy or confidentiality requirements under other laws in the receiving body's home jurisdiction, these laws would continue to apply, which will ensure that information is managed appropriately once disclosed to the body by the VIT. I therefore consider that this provision does not limit the right to privacy.

#### ***Particulars recorded on the Registration Register***

Clause 9 of the Bill amends section 2.6.24 of the Principal Act which establishes the Registration Register and sets out the particulars that the Register must contain in relation to each registered teacher and each registration held by the teacher. Clause 9(2) expands the types of disciplinary actions which need to be recorded on the Registration Register to include the existence of any condition, restriction and limitation imposed on a teacher's registration and whether the teacher has been subject to any caution or reprimand. The particulars of such disciplinary action (subject to any exclusions, for example under sections 2.6.54D or 2.6.54E) are already required by section 2.6.54C of the Principal Act to be included on the Discipline Register.

As outlined above, the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is broad in its scope and extends to provide protection in relation to collection, storage, publication or use of personal information. This right will only be limited where an interference with privacy is unlawful and/or arbitrary.

Expanding the range of actions taken in relation to a teacher which must now be recorded on the Registration Register may result in the disclosure of personal information and so engages the right to privacy. However, given this information in most instances is already recorded (and set out in more detail) on the Discipline Register, any further interference with the right to privacy imposed by clause 9(2) is likely to be minimal. In any event, I consider the interference will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The details of what additional information has to be included on the Registration Register is clearly set out in clause 9(2) and will be published according to legislative requirements. The expansion of the information to be included on the Register serves a legitimate purpose, that is the proper regulation of the teaching profession, the maintenance of high teaching standards and the protection of child safety and wellbeing. A risk has been identified that the additional information captured by clause 9(2) may be missed by relevant persons, for example, prospective employers, if they fail to check both the Registration Register and Discipline Register. As such, this amendment ensures all relevant persons are aware of every condition, limitation or restriction imposed on a teacher's registration and can take any action in compliance with these conditions or to mitigate any risk to child safety and wellbeing that may arise from this information. Further, it is noted that the disclosure of information in relation to professional conduct is consistent with the reasonable expectations of persons who are engaging within a regulated industry where special duties and responsibilities attach. For these reasons, I consider the disclosure of information pursuant to section 2.6.24 as amended by clause 9(2) will be lawful and not capricious, unjust or unreasonable and so will not limit the right to privacy.

#### ***Removal of particulars from the Registration and Discipline Registers***

Clause 14 amends section 2.6.54E to provide the VIT with the discretion to decline to record or remove particulars from the Discipline Register relating to an interim suspension imposed on a registered teacher where the grounds on which the suspension was imposed relate to the teacher's impairment and the VIT is satisfied that it is either not appropriate or in the public interest for the particulars to be recorded on the Discipline Register. Clause 9(3) provides that the VIT must also remove from, or decline to record, the Registration Register relating any particulars which must not be recorded on the Discipline Register under section 2.6.54D, which include any particulars the Institute has determined should not be recorded on Discipline Register under new section 2.6.54E. These clauses promote the right to protection from discrimination under section 8 and right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter as it allows for the non-publication of information that has the potential to unfairly and adversely affect a registered teacher whose behaviour of concern is related to an impairment, including one that is based on a medical condition, outside of the control of the registered teacher.

Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child. This right recognises the special vulnerability of children, and requires the state to adopt social, cultural and economic measures to protect children to foster their development and education.

These clauses may be seen to remove measures which provides protection for the welfare of children and so engage the rights of the child under section 17(2) of the Charter. However, I do not consider this provision limits the right. The VIT is required to consider the circumstances of each matter and can decide to not record or remove particulars under new section 2.6.54(3) and (4) only where it is not appropriate or it is not in the public interest to record such particulars. This allows for the appropriate management of any additional (albeit minimal) risk which may be caused by the non-publication of particulars. As such, I do not consider the rights of the child are limited by this clause.

#### ***Review of interim suspension of teachers and early childhood teachers***

Clauses 11 and 12 amend Division 8A of the Principal Act which provides for the interim suspension of registered teachers and early childhood teachers. Section 2.6.28 of the Principal Act allows the VIT to summarily suspend any and all registrations held by a person if they reasonably believe that the person poses an unacceptable risk of harm to children and the suspension is necessary to protect children. Pursuant to section 2.6.28E(1) the VIT is currently required to review the basis for the suspension within 30 days after the suspension takes effect (initial review) and again within 30 days, and successively thereafter, in order to determine whether or not to continue that suspension (subsequent review). Clause 11 amends section 2.6.28E(1) such that subsequent reviews will now be required to be undertaken every 90 days. Clause 12 makes more explicit an obligation on the VIT to consider information relevant to an interim suspension as soon as practicable after becoming aware of such information.

Section 24(1) of the Charter relevantly provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests.

Section 2.6.28, by allowing for the VIT to suspend a person's registration without first allowing for them to be heard on the decision, imposes a limit on the right to a fair hearing. As outlined in the statement of compatibility to the legislation which inserted Division 8A of Part 2.6 into the Principal Act, that being the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Victorian Institute of Teaching) Act 2015, the purpose of section 2.6.28 is to ensure that the VIT has the power to take immediate action to protect children from potentially serious harm. That statement of compatibility also noted that the requirement to conduct reviews under section 2.6.28E(1) provides procedural protections to minimise the impact on an individual teacher's fair hearing right by affording them the opportunity to be heard shortly after the initial decision is made and on a regular basis thereafter. Since Division 8A came into operation, the VIT has found that most reviews under section 2.6.28E(1) result in a continuation of the interim suspension, as 30 days is rarely sufficient to allow for the provision of information which would cause the VIT to either cancel the interim suspension or suspend the registration of the teacher following a formal investigation and hearing under section 2.6.27. In light of this, the amendments provided for in clause 11 will have minimal impact, as the first review after an interim suspension will still need to be conducted after 30 days. To the extent the subsequent review occurs less frequently, I consider that the more explicit obligation in clause 12 provides additional and sufficient protection to ensure that any new relevant information will be considered in a timely manner after receipt. For these reasons, I consider that there remains adequate protections to ensure there is not an unjustifiable limitation of the fair hearing right.

#### ***Requirement to develop a policy restricting the use of personal electronic devices during school hours***

Part 3 of the Bill amends the Principal Act to introduce a requirement that all schools must develop a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices during school hours and contains any matters required to be included by a Ministerial Order. Personal electronic devices include mobile phones as well as audio devices, smartwatches and other wearable devices. The details of this policy are to be developed by each school as adapted and appropriate to their local context, subject to the requirements of a Ministerial Order.

The purpose of this amendment is to protect the wellbeing and safety of children from cyber bullying and other misuse of personal electronic devices during school hours, as well as to promote effective learning. A 2021 independent evaluation of a ministerial policy in relation to the use of mobile phones during school hours at Government schools found that this policy has resulted in:

- a. An increased focus on learning;
- b. Increased student socialisation and physical activity during breaks;

- c. Fewer incidents of cyberbullying during school hours;
- d. Fewer critical incidents involving mobile phones during school hours (e.g. filming flights, sexting)

This Bill will promote the rights of the child under s 17(2) of the Charter by ensuring that all schools, not just Government schools, have policies restricting the use of personal electronic devices and are able to benefit from these improvements in student wellbeing and learning outcomes.

The precise impacts on rights will differ from school to school, depending on their local circumstances and the policy implemented. However, at a high level, the requirement to develop such a policy may impact on the right to privacy, expression, property, as well as the rights of the child, as identified above.

#### *Right to privacy*

The right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is broad in its scope but will only be limited where an interference with privacy is unlawful and/or arbitrary. The regulation of devices which can capture, store or transmit images or other information may both promote and limit the right to privacy. Restricting the use of devices may protect a person's control over their image and informational privacy, for example, by reducing the instances of non-consensual recording and sending of photos or video. On the other hand, reducing access to a device may reduce a person's ability to exercise their autonomy and capacity to experience a private life and maintain relationships through digital communication while at school. However, I consider that any interferences with the right to privacy are not unlawful or arbitrary.

Any policy will be required by and be lawfully authorised by this Bill with each policy providing clear and accessible guidance by which individuals are able to regulate their behaviour. In my view, any interference is proportionate to the legitimate aims identified above. In particular, it is noted that any limitation on the use of personal devices is confined to during school hours and the policy of a school can make allowances for appropriate phone use having regard to the circumstances of the school and individual students, for example, in the case of a family emergency. As such, I do not consider Part 3 will limit the right to privacy.

#### *Freedom of expression*

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

However, section 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Restricting use of a personal device is relevant to freedom of expression, which encompasses the freedom to impart information of all kinds, including by way of images and using a personal device for communication. For the reasons explained above, I consider that the requirement to develop a policy which restricts the use of personal electronic devices is reasonably necessary to protect children's rights under section 17(2). For this reason, I consider Part 3 of this Bill falls within the exception in section 15(3) and so does not impose a limit on the freedom of expression under section 15(2).

#### *Right to property*

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

Restricting people from using, controlling or being in possession of their personal devices during school hours, engages the right to property. For the reasons noted above in relation to the right to privacy, I consider that this Bill provides the legal authorisation for the development of a policy and is in proportion to the important child safety and wellbeing aims pursued by Part 3. Accordingly, I do not consider this Part limits the right to property.

#### ***Particulars recorded on the Student Register***

Clause 21 amends 5.3A.7 of the Principal Act which establishes the Student Register and requires that certain information relating to any student allocated with a Victorian student number must be included on this register. Clause 21 requires that the country of birth and any other prescribed information must now be included in the Student Register. Clause 20 also amends 5.3A.4(1) to require that this information must be disclosed to the Secretary (who then includes this information on the Student Register).

The right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter is broad in its scope and extends to provide protection in relation to personal information. This right will only be limited where an interference with privacy is unlawful and/or arbitrary.

The disclosure and inclusion on the Student Register of a student's country of birth and any other prescribed information (to the extent it is personal information), engages the right to privacy. However, I consider that as the provision and use of the information is lawful and not arbitrary, there is no limit on this right.

The information on the Student Register is held for the purpose of monitoring student movement across the education and training sectors and provides key data which is used for a range of policy, evaluation and research purposes. Collecting and recording country of birth data is crucial to ensure Victoria is able to comply with its commitment under the national

*Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034* to collect consistent student data that will enable the implementation of the national Unique Student Identifier (USI) program. Under the USI Program, a unique code will be assigned to every student in Australia. It is designed to create a consistent and lifelong education record for each student, enabling seamless tracking and management of a student's data and learning journey across different education sectors and institutions. This will ensure that a student's place of learning has their full educational history which will support the institution to meet the student's developmental needs and achieve good learning outcomes. This is particularly useful for students as they transfer across different stages of the education system and/or between States and Territories. Allowing for further information to be prescribed in the future will allow Victoria to comply with any changes to the information required to be collected under USI program.

The collection, maintenance and use of this data is authorised under the Principal Act and is subject to numerous safeguards including restricting disclosure to the enumerated purposes set out in section 5.3A.9, the offence provision in section 5.3A.10, as well as the protections provided for in the *Privacy Data Protection Act 2014* and the *Secretary's Guidelines on the Victorian Student Number*. The express and clear authorisation for the disclosure of this information for the limited purposes set out in section 5.3A.9 combined with the identified safeguards demonstrate any additional interference on the right to privacy caused by clauses 20 and 21 is appropriately circumscribed and in proportion to the legitimate purposes identified above. It is noted that the prescribing of any further information will be subject to a further assessment of the impact on the right to privacy through a Human Rights Certificate. Accordingly, the right to privacy is not limited by clauses 20 and 21.

**The Hon. Ben Carroll MP**  
**Minister for Education**

### *Second reading*

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:19):  
I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Bill before you today proposes a package of important amendments to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Act). The key features of the Bill include:

- long overdue recognition of First Nations people – including provisions to ensure the Act effectively supports our system to become more inclusive and responsive to the needs of First Nations learners;
- measures to bolster student learning, engagement and mental health by restricting personal electronic devices in our schools; and
- important updates to improve the operation of the teacher registration framework and the Victorian Student Register.

### **Aboriginal recognition and self-determination**

Let me first talk about what we're aiming to achieve through amendments to ensure the Act is best serving First Nations learners.

In Victoria we are immensely proud of our progress over the last decade working together with First Nations people and communities – progress that sees Victoria now leading the nation in Aboriginal affairs through a deep commitment to genuine partnership, self-determination, truth and Treaty.

But these concepts are not reflected in the legislative framework which governs our early childhood education, school education and vocational education and training systems. In fact, the Act does not currently make one single reference to First Nations people or learners.

In June 2024, I had the privilege of appearing before the Yoorrook Justice Commission and was challenged by the Commissioners to increase the rate of system change to support improved First Nations outcomes in education. The then Secretary to the Department of Education was also directly questioned by the Commission about the Act's application to, or provisions for, First Nations people and learners, and in response undertook to explore how the Act can be amended in line with current understandings about what works to lift learning and life outcomes for First Nations people and students.

As well as responding to issues raised through Yoorrook Justice Commission hearings, the amendments proposed in the Bill have also been developed with Treaty front of mind. The Bill includes an acknowledgement of the Victorian Treaty process, and all proposed amendments have been designed to strengthen self-determination in the administration and delivery of education in Victoria while not limiting the ability of the system to implement its Statewide Treaty commitments, or respond to any further Statewide and/or Traditional Owner Treaty matters that may be negotiated in the future.

The Bill before you today inserts into the Act a new Statement of Recognition that incorporates truth-telling and properly acknowledges the unique status of First Nations Victorians in the law underpinning education in Victoria. It recognises the historical and ongoing factors that have impacted and continue to impact First Nations outcomes, and the critical role of the education system in improving outcomes. It acknowledges the strength and advocacy of generations of First Nations leaders for better opportunities for their young people. This Bill is one example of the power of that advocacy.

Complementing the Statement of Recognition, the Bill also enacts a new set of principles which recognise and honour the cultural rights and history of First Nations people as the first teachers and learners of Victoria, and which embed self-determination at the core of the delivery of early childhood education, school education and vocational education and training services to First Nations learners.

The new statutory principles will apply to every person and institution working in or across Victorian early childhood services, government and non-government schools, and vocational education and training. They make it clear that First Nations people interacting with our system – whether they are learners, family or community members or staff – have a right to expect that education settings across Victoria are culturally safe and inclusive, and free of racism.

The Bill introduces a legal obligation for the departmental secretaries with responsibilities in relation to our education systems to promote and strengthen Aboriginal self-determination by working in partnership with First Nations community representatives. We know that for First Nations programs and policies to be effective, First Nations people need to lead decision-making about their design and implementation, including defining what success looks like and how those responsible for delivery should be held to account. This important amendment aims to put our stated commitment to self-determination in education and learning into practical effect.

The Bill will also introduce a new duty on the responsible secretaries to ensure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training will be made available to anyone working to support learning and wellbeing in or across early childhood education services, schools, TAFEs, Adult, Community and Further education providers and state funded or registered training organisations. This means that, wherever First Nations people interact with our education system, whether that be as a learner, a parent or family member, or as a member of the workforce, they can be confident that the staff they encounter and interact with always have access to high quality information and training about First Nations histories and cultures, and how to undertake their role in a way that is culturally safe.

The Bill also enshrines in law our commitment to ensuring all students learn about First Nations histories, cultures and perspectives as part of the curriculum in Victorian schools.

These elements have been part of the Victorian Curriculum since the nineties, and it is high time we recognised their importance within the core learning areas described in the Act.

First Nations communities rightly have the very highest aspirations for their young people's education and wellbeing – they want and expect our education system to be responsive to their children's needs and to enable them to excel.

As we move into the Treaty era, continue to respond to the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recommendations and plan for the next phase of ambitious reform in First Nations education, now is the time to establish a solid foundation for positive change. And this change is something for all Victorians to celebrate, because we know that when we strengthen the system for First Nations people, we strengthen it for all Victorians.

#### **Restricting personal mobile devices in schools**

In 2020, this Government was the first in the country to introduce a new requirement in government schools that student mobile phones must be switched off and securely stored during the school day. This policy has improved student focus on learning and increased student socialisation and physical activity during breaks.

In addition, there have been fewer incidents of cyberbullying and critical incidents involving mobile phones during school hours since the introduction of the policy.

As technology has developed, government schools have reported increasing issues surrounding the use of other sorts of devices that are not covered by existing policy. Not only can these devices be a distraction in the classroom, but many can covertly capture images and footage, carrying significant privacy and safety risks.

With all of this in mind, the Bill proposes to require that all Victorian schools, both government and non-government, have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices, including mobile phones, wearable devices and personal audio devices, during school hours, as a prescribed minimum standard for registration.

This new prescribed minimum standard for school registration will not only extend the benefits of the mobile phone policy for government schools to all Victorian schools, but will reduce some of the harmful effects of other sorts of devices. Requiring that the policies restrict personal electronic devices and not just mobile phones will also future proof this minimum standard and ensure all future Victorian students have improved student learning, engagement and mental health outcomes.

### **Improving the Teacher Registration Framework**

The Bill will also make a number of amendments to Part 2.6 of the Act, which establishes the governance framework and powers and functions of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). By improving the effectiveness of this framework, the Bill will allow the VIT to discharge its responsibilities in a more effective and efficient manner, including when responding to child safety risks.

#### Interim suspension decision making authority

Currently, only the VIT Council and CEO (where the Council has delegated the power to the CEO) is empowered to impose an interim suspension of a teacher's registration. Interim suspensions are only able to be imposed in the most serious circumstances, namely where the Council or CEO reasonably believes both that person poses an unacceptable risk of harm to children and that a suspension to their registration is necessary to protect children.

While it is appropriate that there are limits on who is empowered to make such important decisions, the inflexibility of the current framework can create child safety risks when a decision needs to be made promptly to protect children and there is no authorised decision maker available to make the decision. For example, if the CEO is unavailable due to unforeseen illness or absence, a meeting of the VIT Council must be convened to impose an interim suspension, which results in delays in the exercise of the power and the overall response to child safety risk that the suspension is intended to address.

To introduce greater flexibility as to who may impose interim suspensions, the Bill will allow the VIT Council to specify VIT employees who the CEO will be able to subsequently authorise to make interim suspension decisions on behalf of the CEO. This ensures that someone will always be available to make those time critical decisions when the CEO is otherwise unavailable while also ensuring that the CEO remains accountable for the decisions made by authorised employees.

The Bill includes additional protections, including by inserting requirements in relation to the skills, experience and knowledge of VIT staff members who may be authorised while also providing the VIT Council with the ultimate authority for deciding who may be authorised.

#### Periodic reviews of interim suspensions

The VIT is currently required to review the basis of an interim suspension 30 days after the original decision and every 30 days thereafter, regardless of whether it has received any new information. Many reviews result in a continuation of the interim suspension as the VIT has not received any new or additional information which is relevant to its opinion as to whether the interim suspension continues to be necessary to protect children.

The need to review interim suspensions every 30 days, even without any new or additional information, creates a resourcing burden on the VIT, which needs to support the Council or CEO (under delegated) authority to make a review decision. These are resources which the VIT would be able to better direct to address other high risk regulatory matters.

To ease these resourcing constraints while ensuring interim suspensions remain in force no longer than necessary, the Bill proposes two key changes to the way the VIT reviews and monitors interim suspension decisions.

First of all, the VIT will be required to review the basis for an interim suspension within 30 days of the initial decision and then within 90 days of that review and every subsequent review.

Secondly, the Bill will provide greater clarity about existing requirements in the Act that the VIT consider and act on any new information it receives about an interim suspension as soon as practicable after the information is received, including by deciding to, where appropriate, revoke the suspension. The amendment will put beyond doubt that, regardless of the date of a required review of an interim suspension, the VIT must consider new information presented to it and determine whether or not the interim suspension should remain in force. Together with the existing provisions in the Act, which require the VIT to hold a reasonable belief about the risk posed by an individual and the necessity of the interim suspension to protect children, this change will ensure that interim suspensions are only in place for as long as they are necessary. Despite the increase to the periodic review period, this change will create a fairer and more efficient process overall.

#### Information sharing and publication

The Bill will extend the VIT's powers to collect and disclose information about current and former registered teachers to also include as yet unregistered teachers applying for teacher registration. This will mean that the VIT will be able to obtain reliable, third party verified information about applicants for teacher registration to make safe, evidence-based decisions about who is suitable to teach.

The Bill will also expand what particulars must be included in the Register of Registered Teachers (RRT), a publicly available register that records information about persons who hold a registration to teach.

Currently, the VIT is only required to ensure that the RRT includes limited information about the disciplinary action taken against a registered teacher. It does not include other matters that may be relevant to persons accessing the RRT, such as information about any cautions or reprimands. This creates a child safety risk such as where a prospective employer or community member may not be informed of other, lower level actions taken against a teacher, particularly where they have not looked at the Register of Disciplinary Action (RODA), which is a separate publicly available register displaying disciplinary actions taken against registered teachers.

To address this gap and ensure child safety is promoted both inside and outside the classroom, the Bill will expand the RRT to include details about whether a teacher's registration is subject to any condition, limitation or restriction, or if the teacher has been subject to any caution or reprimand. While this information is already available on the RODA, also including these details are on the RRT will remove any potential gaps and help interested parties to obtain the information they need to make fully informed decisions.

#### Qualification requirements for the Chairperson of the VIT Council

The Bill will also widen the candidate pool for the for the Chairperson of the VIT Council. Currently, the Chairperson is required to be a registered teacher or principal. The VIT Council Chairperson has an important range of governance responsibilities, and it is appropriate that potential candidates for this role have the necessary broad governance and management experience required for such an important and high-profile role in our community.

While knowledge and experience of the teaching sector is important, the profession is already well represented on the VIT Council, with half its membership required to be made up of registered teachers, something that will not change as a result of this amendment.

The current and previous Chairpersons of the VIT Council have shown commendable leadership and knowledge of the sector throughout their tenures. However, broadening the qualification requirements for the Council Chairperson aims to provide greater flexibility in a landscape of increasing regulatory complexity.

These changes to the Act and the other amendments to the governance framework of the VIT look forward to the future to improve the operational efficiency of the VIT and strengthen child safety.

#### **Victorian Student Register**

The Bill also proposes changes that allow additional information to be recorded in the Victorian Student Register, enabling Victoria to implement its contribution to the national Schools Unique Student Identifier (USI) for Victorian schools and students as required by the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034 Heads of Agreement. This will bring us into step with the Commonwealth's national approach to the implementation of the national Schools USI, which aims to create a lifelong education record for students across educational institutions across the country.

These proposed amendments are required to permit the collection of 'country of birth' student data within the VSR, which is part of the minimum data set currently attached to a Victorian student's Victorian Student Number.

The VSR is the central repository for the Victorian Student Number and related data across the state. Victoria and Western Australia are the only jurisdictions with an existing student identity solution that services all the K–12 school settings. The amendments will enable Victoria to use the VSR to consistently implement the

national Schools USI in all school settings. This will remove the administrative burden on schools needing to separately provide the information to the Commonwealth.

Additionally, the proposed amendments enable any future data sets required by the Commonwealth to be prescribed in the regulations, providing flexibility for data sets to be incorporated in the future without needing to amend the Act.

Together, this package of amendments stands to further strengthen the Act as part of our ongoing work to ensure Victoria remains the Education State.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:20): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 16 April.**

### **Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:21): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026 (the **Bill**).

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

#### **Overview of the Bill**

The purposes of the Bill include establishing Outdoor Recreation Victoria, whose objects include:

- promoting sustainability and responsibility in game hunting, recreational fishing and boating, and commercial fishing and aquaculture;
- optimising the social, cultural and economic benefits of outdoor recreation in Victoria in a sustainable manner; and
- supporting the development of the outdoor recreation sector, the commercial fishing and aquaculture sector, and the aquaculture sector.

The purposes of the Bill also include repealing the *Game Management Authority Act 2014* and the *Victorian Fisheries Authority Act 2016*.

#### **Human rights issues**

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

- the right to equality before the law (section 8(2) and (3) of the Charter);
- the right to privacy (section 13(a));
- the right to freedom of expression (section 15(2));
- the right to take part in public life (section 18);
- property rights (section 20);
- the right to a fair hearing (section 24(1));
- the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty (section 25(1)); and
- the right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26).

#### **Principles to which Outdoor Recreation Victoria must have regard**

Clause 10 requires Outdoor Recreation Victoria to have regard to the principles set out in Division 3 of Part 2 of the Bill when exercising its powers or performing its functions. One of these principles is the principle of equity, defined in clause 15(a)(i) to include equity between persons irrespective of their personal attributes including age, physical ability, ethnicity, culture, gender and financial situation.

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to its equal protection without discrimination. Section 8(3) also provides that every person has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

Consideration of the principle of equity by Outdoor Recreation Victoria will promote the right of everyone to equality before the law under section 8 of the Charter.

#### **Appointment of directors to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Board**

Under section 8(2) and (3) of the Charter, discrimination relevantly includes indirect discrimination, which occurs if a person imposes an unreasonable requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging people with a protected attribute including, relevantly, profession, trade or occupation, or race.

Section 18(2)(b) of the Charter provides that every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

Clause 21(2) of the Bill provides that, in appointing a director to the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Board, the Minister must ensure, as far as practicable, that the directors of the Board collectively have the skills, experience and knowledge specified in that subclause, including governance skills, legal or regulatory experience, experience in outdoor recreation, commercial fishing or aquaculture, and knowledge of First Peoples culture, community leadership and perspectives.

While clause 21(2) may affect the potential for people who do not belong to particular professions, trades or occupations, or who are not First Peoples, to be appointed as directors, I do not consider that this would constitute indirect discrimination under the Charter. This is because such requirements are reasonable. The skills and experience specified in clause 21(2) are directly related to the responsibilities of the Board and they ensure that the Board has the specialist skills and experience to acquit its responsibilities.

Further, clause 21(3) provides that the Minister must not appoint a person to the Board if satisfied that the person has a conflict of interest specified in clause 25(1) (eg, because they hold a commercial fishery or aquaculture licence), or is in a position or role that is not specified but that would otherwise conflict with the role of director. I also do not consider that excluding people of certain professions, trades or occupations would constitute indirect discrimination. This is because clauses 21(3) and 25(1) are reasonable and serve the important purpose of ensuring the independence of directors and ensuring they make impartial decisions.

Section 18(2)(b) of the Charter is principally concerned with affording access to public office on general terms of equality. Given that I do not consider that clauses 21 and 25 constitute

discrimination, and that the qualifications they impose on eligibility for appointment to the Board (and exclusion from the Board because of conflicts of interest) are otherwise reasonably justified, I consider that clauses 21 and 25 are compatible with the right to take part in public life under the Charter.

#### **Vacancies in the office of a director and removal from office**

Under clause 23(1) of the Bill, the office of a director of the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Board becomes vacant if the director is convicted or found guilty of an indictable offence, or an offence that, if committed in Victoria, would be an indictable offence, or is removed from office, among other circumstances. Under clause 23(2), the Minister may remove a director from office if the director is convicted or found guilty of an offence against a relevant law, or engages in improper conduct, or if the Minister considers that the director is no longer suitable to hold office, among other circumstances.

The nexus between a criminal conviction and the vacation of, or removal from, office engages:

- the right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26 of the Charter);
- the right to a fair hearing (section 24(1));
- the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty (section 25(1)); and
- the right to take part in public life (section 18).

#### ***Rights not to be punished more than once and to have a criminal charge decided by a court***

Section 26 of the Charter will be relevant if the vacation of the office of a director or the removal of a director from office under clause 23(1)(b) and (2)(f) of the Bill constitutes an additional ‘punishment’ for an offence for which the person has been finally convicted. This right may also be relevant to clause 23(2)(c), which allows for the possibility that a criminal charge could be considered by the Minister as relevant to the assessment of suitability to hold office, or to clause 23(2)(d), which allows for removal if the director engages in improper conduct. Relevant to the concept of punishment, and following recent decisions of the High Court

concerning the constitutional validity of schemes involving 'legislated punishment' in the Commonwealth sphere, it may be suggested that the right in section 24(1) to have a criminal charge decided by a court implies a principle that a person may only be punished as a result of a charge being proven in a criminal proceeding.

In my view, clause 23 does not engage sections 24(1) or 26 of the Charter because the vacation of, or removal from, office of a director by reference to a criminal charge (as part of an assessment of suitability to hold office, or of improper conduct), or to a conviction or guilty finding of criminal conduct is not to be characterised as imposing a form of punishment for the following reasons:

- The mere fact that a law operates to directly impose a detriment on a person does not make it punitive. Rather, the criteria by reference to which the detriment is imposed, and also the purpose for which it is imposed, are central to determining whether the imposition of a particular detriment is properly characterised as punitive. Clause 23 serves a protective purpose, being to ensure the integrity and good governance of the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Board, and to safeguard the public's trust and confidence in it. Consistent with this purpose, a criminal charge will not result in automatic removal from office. Rather, pursuant to clause 23(2)(c) and (d), a criminal charge may be a factor in the Minister's consideration of a person's suitability for office or as part of the Minister's determination of what constitutes improper conduct.
- The effect of being removed from office under clause 23(2), is to prevent a person whose eligibility has come into question from undertaking the responsibilities of the Outdoor Recreation Victoria Board.
- Finally, the nature of the detriment being imposed (ie, vacation of or removal from office) is not associated with a criminal sanction. A person would not be liable for subsequent sanctions of a criminal nature, such as a fine or imprisonment.

Accordingly, clause 23 does not amount to double punishment for the purpose of section 26, or engage the determination of a criminal charge pursuant to section 24(1), and these rights are therefore not limited.

#### ***Right to be presumed innocent***

The Supreme Court has found that the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in section 25(1) of the Charter appears to apply only in criminal proceedings, which would not include the vacation of, or removal from, office of a director under clause 23.

In the event that section 25(1) was found to have application beyond criminal proceedings, then if the Minister were to take a criminal charge into account in considering whether a director was no longer suitable to hold office under clause 23(2)(c), or had engaged in improper conduct under clause 23(2)(d), section 25(1) may be limited. However, I consider that any such limitation would be reasonably justified. As noted above, the purpose of clause 23 is to safeguard the integrity of these offices, which is legitimate and important.

Further, as a public authority under the Charter, in making this assessment the Minister must act compatibility with the Charter, including giving proper consideration to the right to be presumed innocent. Accordingly, I consider that any potential limitation would be in proportion to its aim and that clause 23(2)(c) and (d) would be compatible with section 25(1) of the Charter, if it were found to have application beyond criminal proceedings.

#### ***Right to take part in public life***

As noted above, section 18(2)(b) is principally concerned with affording access to public office on general terms of equality. As being convicted of a criminal offence is not a protected attribute for the purposes of discrimination under the Charter, it follows that the right to take part in public life is not limited by clause 23.

#### **Disclosure of interests by a director and information**

Section 13(a) of the Charter prohibits unlawful or arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy. Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

Clause 29 of the Bill requires a director who has a pecuniary interest in a matter being considered by the Board to declare the nature of that interest at a Board meeting. In addition to pecuniary interests, clause 30(1) requires a director who has an interest in a matter being considered by the Board to disclose the nature of the interest to the chairperson. Clause 30(2) requires the chairperson, if they have an interest in a matter being considered by the Board, to disclose the nature of the interest to the Minister.

#### ***Right to privacy***

To the extent that the disclosures required by clauses 29 and 30 contain personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter. In my opinion, any limit on the right to privacy imposed by these clauses is reasonable and justified. The information disclosed is limited to a relevant interest, being either a pecuniary interest or a type of interest specified in guidelines made by the Board pursuant to

clause 30(3). These clauses are aimed at ensuring the independence of the Board and only apply to directors and the Chairperson who have all voluntarily assumed roles to which special obligations apply, including these obligations to disclose matters that are within the public interest to declare. Accordingly, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy would be lawful and not arbitrary.

Clause 32 of the Bill prohibits a person who is, or has been, a director, authorised officer, officer or employee of Outdoor Recreation Victoria from disclosing any information obtained during the course of the person's duties, except as authorised under clause 32.

#### ***Freedom of expression***

In respect of section 15(2) of the Charter, by prohibiting disclosures of information, clause 32 may impose a limitation on the right to freedom of expression. In my view, this is a lawful restriction which is reasonably necessary to protect public order within the meaning of the internal limitation in section 15(3), which has been interpreted broadly. Further, this restriction is limited to information obtained during the course of a person's duties and is subject to the exceptions specified in clause 32(2), including where the person reasonably believes that the disclosure is necessary in certain circumstances. Accordingly, I am of the view that clause 32 imposes no limitation on the right to freedom of expression.

#### **Transfer of property and liabilities from the Game Management Authority and Victorian Fisheries Authority to Outdoor Recreation Victoria**

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. While the Victorian courts have not determined whether the right to bring a claim against the State constitutes 'property' for the purposes of section 20 of the Charter, the Supreme Court has indicated that the term should be 'interpreted liberally and beneficially to encompass economic interests'. This could include contractual rights and accrued causes of action. Section 20 requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

Additionally, section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. Part of the right to a fair hearing, protected in section 24(1), is the common law right to unimpeded access to the courts.

Clause 53 of the Bill provides that, on commencement day, the Game Management Authority is abolished and all of its rights, property and liabilities are transferred to Outdoor Recreation Victoria. Clause 53 also provides that Outdoor Recreation Victoria is substituted as a party in any proceeding to which the Game Management Authority was party immediately before commencement day, and is substituted as a party to any contract or arrangement entered into by or on behalf of the Game Management Authority. Clause 62 provides for the same transfer of rights, property and liabilities from the Victorian Fisheries Authority to Outdoor Recreation Victoria, and the same substitution of Outdoor Recreation Victoria for Victorian Fisheries Authority in any proceeding, contract or arrangement.

#### ***Right to property***

The transfer of property, rights and liabilities from both the Game Management Authority and the Victorian Fisheries Authority to Outdoor Recreation Victoria is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the liability transferred. However, this transfer of liabilities will not limit the property rights of persons holding the interest as they are not being deprived of their interest in the liability. Rather, the liability is transferred from one statutory entity to another without altering the substantive content of that right.

Insofar as a cause of action in relation to any potential liability held by the Game Management Authority or the Victorian Fisheries Authority may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, clauses 53 and 62 may engage this right. However, in my opinion, these new provisions do not effect a deprivation of property as they do not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against the Game Management Authority or the Victorian Fisheries Authority. Rather, liability is transferred to Outdoor Recreation Victoria.

#### ***Right to a fair hearing***

For the same reasons outlined in the paragraph above, a person would not be prevented from bringing an action concerning matters in relation to the Game Management Authority or the Victorian Fisheries Authority because that person could commence the action against Outdoor Recreation Victoria, which would also be substituted for either Authority in any existing proceedings. Accordingly, in my view, clauses 53 and 62 would not limit section 24(1) of the Charter.

**Transfer of staff from the Game Management Authority and Victorian Fisheries Authority to Outdoor Recreation Victoria**

Section 11 of the Charter provides that a person must not be made to perform forced work or compulsory labour. The right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter is broad and encompasses rights to physical and psychological integrity, and individual identity. It has been interpreted to extend to matters relating to the right to seek employment, and may be interfered with where employment restrictions impact sufficiently on the personal relationships of the individual and otherwise upon the person's capacity to experience a private life.

The Bill provides that a person who, immediately before the commencement day, was employed by the Game Management Authority (clause 58) and the Victorian Fisheries Authority (clause 67) is taken to be an employee of Outdoor Recreation Victoria on the same terms and conditions and with the same accrued entitlements as applied before the commencement day. The transfer of staff occasioned by these amendments is relevant to the Charter rights to freedom from forced work (section 11) and the right to privacy (section 13(a)). However, for the reasons below, I consider that neither right is limited by these clauses.

***Freedom from forced work***

While clauses 58 and 67 effecting the transfer of staff will automatically alter a person's employer without their consent, the person's ongoing employment is of their own volition. Accordingly, the right to freedom from forced work is not limited by clauses 58 and 67.

***Right to privacy***

While the right to privacy has been interpreted as being relevant to matters of employment, it would generally only be considered limited by restrictions on employment that have consequential effects on an individual's capacity to experience a private life. Given an employee is not denied the capacity to seek alternative employment on similar terms, in my view, clauses 58 and 67 do not constitute an interference with private life of sufficient gravity so as to limit the right to privacy. Further, the proposed transfer will not result in any material detriment to a staff member's employment terms, conditions or entitlements, so I am satisfied that the right to privacy is not limited by clauses 58 and 67.

**The Hon. Steve Dimopoulos MP**  
**Minister for Outdoor Recreation**

*Second reading*

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:21): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026 delivers the government's vision to enable and strengthen outdoor recreation in Victoria by consolidating the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) and the Game Management Authority (GMA) into a new statutory authority, Outdoor Recreation Victoria (ORV), with an expanded scope.

ORV will continue the strong regulatory responsibilities for game hunting and fisheries currently managed by the VFA and GMA, while expanding their functions to play a critical role in promoting broader participation in outdoor recreation, supporting sector development and promoting and supporting access to public land for outdoor recreation. Additionally, ORV will continue the role that VFA currently plays in supporting commercial fisheries and aquaculture.

The establishment of ORV was announced in December 2025 in the government's response to the Silver Review and aligns to the 2024 Economic Growth Statement commitment to consolidate regulators. However, it is not driven by efficiencies – rather, it is about increasing opportunities for Victorians and improving the services that support them.

We have heard from Victorians that they want more opportunity to get out and about in nature, and this government is committed to making that happen. Whether it's fishing, four-wheel driving, camping, hunting, bushwalking or any other outdoor activity, Victoria has some of the best parkland, waterways and natural resources in the country. ORV will help more locals and visitors experience the full range of outdoor opportunities in Victoria by working across government to create a digital hub that brings together outdoor recreation information in one place – giving people a single jumping off point for all the information they need about outdoor recreation in our State.

The Premier has made clear her support for Victorians getting out into the great outdoors. The Outdoor Recreation Portfolio is central to making sure Victorians can enjoy the great outdoors with free and low-cost activities.

ORV will also play a critical role promoting access to public land for outdoor recreation by working directly with the outdoor recreation community, public land and waterway managers and key government departments to overcome barriers to public access. In this capacity it will advise the Minister for Outdoor Recreation on opportunities to make it easier for Victorians to access the incredible outdoor recreation activities available on public land in Victoria.

Alongside the extensive physical and mental health benefits outdoor recreation activities provide, they are also key economic drivers for our state and in particular for our regional communities. In 2019 recreational fishing and boating contributed \$5.82 billion to the Victorian economy and supported 56,000 jobs, while game hunting contributed \$356 million and supported 3,138 jobs. We expect these numbers to be significantly higher today. Alongside that, the visitor contribution from nature-based tourism is increasing year on year and was estimated at \$5.3 billion last year. The important role ORV will have in growing participation in outdoor recreation, and supporting sector development, will help foster regional economic development and provide growth and employment opportunities for communities transitioning away from native timber harvest.

In recognition of Traditional Owners' unique connection to Country, ORV will engage with First Peoples and Traditional owners in a culturally respectful and inclusive way that supports Treaty and self-determination. In doing so ORV will embed Traditional Owner knowledge and expertise in its strategic and operational planning. This will be achieved through the requirements of this Bill, which supports representation of First Peoples' cultural knowledge and community leadership on its Board, and by fostering strong partnerships with Traditional Owners across Victoria.

The VFA and GMA have achieved a huge amount since their establishments in 2016 and 2013 respectively.

The VFA has increased fish stocking to 10 million fish per year, expanded hatchery infrastructure at Arcadia and Snobs Creek, and delivered more than \$60 million in investment to maintain, enhance or develop new recreational boating infrastructure through Better Boating Victoria. Meanwhile, the GMA has supported the implementation of adaptive harvest management framework for Victorian game duck hunting, expanded compliance operations and strengthened partnerships with Victoria Police.

ORV is about taking the work the VFA and GMA have done and building upon it, with expanded objectives and functions and a strengthened governance framework. As I will stress later, all staff from the VFA and GMA, including authorised officers, will transition across to ORV on day 1 enabling ORV to maintain regulatory continuity across game hunting and fishing.

Stakeholders, particularly hunters and fishers, have been overwhelmingly supportive of the proposal to establish ORV, rightly seeing it as a statement of government's intent to enable the outdoor recreation sector to thrive in Victoria. VRFish, the State's recreational fishing peak body, welcomed ORV and the ways it will make it easier for more Victorians to enjoy our great outdoors. Similarly, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia's Victorian division has expressed its support, highlighting the benefits ORV's ability to support growth, education and participation will bring to Victorians, along with the positive impact to regional communities.

#### Provisions of the Bill

Speaker, I now turn to the provisions of the Bill.

Commencement will be by proclamation, but my intention is for Outdoor Recreation Victoria to begin operation on 1 July 2026, subject to passage of this Bill.

#### Objectives and Functions

This Bill takes the combined objectives and functions of the VFA and GMA as its starting point. Importantly, this means that, amongst other things, it will retain the strong regulatory role for recreational fishing, commercial fishing and aquaculture and game hunting through its provision of information and education, as well as its monitoring, compliance and enforcement functions. To that end ORV will have the identical regulatory footprint of the VFA and GMA. It will also retain a strong focus on research and maintaining operational plans, including relating to the humane treatment of animals that are hunted or fished.

ORV is more than simply a merger of the VFA and GMA. ORV's objectives and functions have been expanded in three key non-regulatory areas.

ORV will have a new role to promote participation in outdoor recreation. Just as the VFA has worked to promote participation in recreational fishing, ORV will seek to do so for outdoor recreation more broadly. Initially this promotion function will focus on recreational fishing, boating and game hunting, as well as the

aligned activities of four-wheel driving and bush camping before considering expansion to other activities in the future. In this capacity, ORV will simplify the pathway for people to get the information they need to safely participate in outdoor recreation activities.

Secondly, it will work to optimise the benefits of outdoor recreation in a sustainable manner, and support the development of the outdoor recreation sector, as well as the commercial fishing and aquaculture sectors. Initially, the focus for ORV will be to support the sector through growing participation and realising the corresponding health, cultural, economic and employment benefits that result from increased participation.

Finally, ORV will have both an objective and function to promote and support access to public land for outdoor recreation. We have heard from Victorians about the barriers to access to public land, and ORV's new scope is explicitly intended to address this. To this end it will work with public land and waterway managers, stakeholders and, where appropriate, private landowners, to explore opportunities to improve public access arrangements and make it easier for Victorians to get outdoors.

Government will provide clear guidance to ORV that these new objectives and functions will be exercised by ORV within the bounds of sustainable capacity. This must be done in a manner aligned with ORV's regulatory role and through engagement with public land and waterway managers, respecting their authority and regulatory responsibilities over matters within their jurisdiction.

There have also been minor changes to clarify ORV's advisory functions and to better align those functions to the legislative framework under the Public Administration Act 2004 as well as government policy for statutory authorities.

#### Governance arrangements

This Bill provides ORV with a significantly strengthened governance framework including an increased focus on the core-governance skills of directors. ORV will be governed by a Board of 5–9 directors, including a Chair and deputy Chair, appointed by the Minister for terms of up to three years. The Board will collectively have knowledge and skills in financial administration, risk management, strategic planning, legal experience or regulatory knowledge or experience, experience in the outdoor recreation sector and knowledge of First Peoples culture, community leadership and perspectives.

The intent is for the Board's focus to be distinctly on the financial management, governance, strategic planning, organisational culture and risk management of ORV, with ORV's staff or appointed advisory committees, bringing the subject matter expertise across outdoor recreation interests.

#### Staff

To enable the transition from VFA and GMA to ORV, the Bill provides for ORV to initially be led by an interim chief executive officer appointed by the Minister, but responsible to and reporting to the Board, for a period of up to 12 months.

The Bill further provides that ORV's substantive chief executive officer will be employed by the Board, with the Minister's approval. Both interim, and substantive, chief executives will have the power to employ staff.

#### Authorised officers

ORV will have the power to appoint authorised officers, as the VFA and GMA currently do, to monitor and enforce the game hunting and fishing regulatory frameworks. The consolidation represents a significant opportunity to leverage the combined pool of authorised officers across fishing and game hunting to improve and optimise ORV's compliance effort. In particular, ORV will be more equipped to resource surge events like the opening of duck season, which the VFA has historically assisted the GMA with, or peak summer holiday fishing compliance activities.

#### Land Access Panel

Importantly, the Bill also establishes a Land Access Panel to provide advice and information to government to identify new opportunities for community access across public land and waterways. As part of this advice the panel will report on existing and proposed restrictions and barriers to improving access to public lands and waterways. As Minister for Outdoor Recreation, I will appoint members to this Panel to represent a range of interests relating to outdoor recreation, including Traditional Owners, public land and waterway managers, ORV and external stakeholders. The establishment of this Panel represents this government's commitment to improving opportunities for Victorians to access public land and waterways for outdoor recreation.

#### Transitional arrangements

To enable regulatory and operational continuity, the Bill provides for several important transitional matters. Most importantly, and to provide surety to VFA and GMA staff, the Bill will transfer all staff of the VFA and GMA, except their CEOs, to ORV on their existing terms and conditions, and with their existing entitlements.

The Bill also abolishes the VFA and GMA and ends the terms of their boards on commencement. It establishes ORV as successor-in-law to the VFA and GMA, as well as transferring property, rights and liabilities of both entities to ORV and substituting ORV as a party in any proceeding or agreement that either entity is named in.

Critically, the Bill provides for the transition of the appointments of the VFA and GMA's authorised officers so that ORV is able to acquire its core regulatory responsibility for game hunting, recreational fishing and commercial fishing and aquaculture.

These transitional provisions will enable ORV to hit the ground running from day 1, maintaining the high standard of regulatory responsibility for game hunting and fishing.

#### Conclusion

I would like to acknowledge the important interfaces between ORV's regulatory roles relating to game hunting and fishing, its promotional role relating to outdoor recreation, and the public land management roles played by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Parks Victoria.

This Bill represents a key step in reforming the outdoor recreation sector and establishing a new statutory authority with the appropriate scope and remit to not only regulate game hunting and fishing, but to also enable greater support and promotion to grow outdoor recreation in Victoria. This is about maximising the opportunities we have in this State, making it easier for every Victorian to enjoy the outdoors, while supporting regional economic growth and jobs in the process.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:21): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 16 April.**

### **Roads, Road Safety and Ports Legislation Amendment Bill 2026**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:22): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Roads, Road Safety and Ports Legislation Amendment Bill 2026:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Roads, Road Safety and Ports Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 (the **Bill**).

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

#### **Overview of the Bill**

The purpose of the Bill is to:

- amend the *Road Safety Act 1986* (the **Act**) to provide for the use of point to point average speed limit enforcement in Victoria, to include its use on roads with multiple speed limits and to clarify its use on a network of roads or where temporary speed limits are in place;
- to amend the *Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013* in relation to emergency services exemptions from certain fatigue management requirements;
- to amend the *Road Management Act 2004* to provide for the temporary declaration of roads by the Head, Transport for Victoria;
- to amend toll road legislation to transfer functions from the Secretary to the Department of Transport and Planning to the Head, Transport for Victoria and to make minor and technical amendments to that legislation;
- to amend the *Port Management Act 1995* in relation to information gathering and charges; and
- to make other minor and technical amendments to the *Road Safety Act 1986* and other Acts.

**Human rights issues**

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- right to freedom of movement (s 12); and
- right to be presumed innocent (s 25(1)).

***Right to freedom of movement***

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria, to enter and leave Victoria, and to choose where to live in Victoria. The right extends, generally, to movement without impediment throughout the State, and a right of access to places and services used by members of the public, subject to compliance with regulations legitimately made in the public interest. The right does not extend to any positive obligation on the State to promote freedom of movement.

Clause 30 of the Bill inserts new Division 1A into the *Road Management Act 2004* (RM Act) and new s 16A which allows the Head, Transport for Victoria, to make a temporary declaration of road in certain circumstances, including if the road is already open to the public and the Head, Transport for Victoria, believes that it is in the interests of the public for the road to be immediately opened to the public. The temporary road declaration may be for a period of no more than a year, with one further extension of up to a year allowed by new s 16C. New s 16E provides that once a temporary road declaration expires or is revoked, the road the subject of the declaration is taken to have been discontinued in accordance with s 12. Section 16E(3) then provides that for the avoidance of doubt, s 10 of the RM Act applies to a road discontinued under that section, and the rights of the public under that Act or at common law in relation to a public highway created by the temporary road declaration are extinguished.

The making of a temporary road declaration promotes freedom of movement by enabling the public to access roads more quickly and is intended to grant use of a road while administrative processes are still being undertaken. While it is intended that a temporary road declaration would be followed by a permanent road declaration under s 11 of the Act, such that relevant rights in respect of a public highway remain, there may be rare circumstances in which a temporary road declaration does expire or is revoked and the road is discontinued. This will result in members of the public having any residual rights in relation to a public highway under the RM Act and the common law extinguished, including the ability to access and travel on that road. This in turn is relevant to the right to freedom of movement, given the practical effect of this statutory provision is to inhibit a person's right to freely moving along that road. However, as the later extinguishment of public highway rights occurs in the context where such rights were temporarily conferred, in my view, the removal of a temporary benefit that is intended to be time-limited does not in itself constitute a limit to the right to freedom of movement.

However, to the extent the right is limited, I am of the view that any limit is reasonable and justified in the circumstances, given the purpose of the temporary road declaration is to open a road to the public where there is an urgent need, and it is in the public interest, but various administrative processes have not yet been completed, for example the required consents from Ministers or municipal councils and relevant road authorities have not been received or the boundaries of the road have not yet been fully determined. The circumstances in which a temporary road declaration is not made permanent, and the public's rights in relation to a public highway are extinguished, would be rare, and would have a legitimate purpose such as public safety. The application of s 10 of the RM Act and the extinguishment of common law rights and rights under the RM Act is the current position when a road ceases to be a road, so clause 30 of the Bill does not alter the status quo in this regard. Finally, any limit on the right to freedom movement would be minimal, with road users able to find alternative routes to continue to move freely around Victoria.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that clause 30 is compatible with the Charter.

***Right to be presumed innocent***

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

**Reasonable excuse defences**

Clause 50 of the Bill inserts new ss 91AAB and 91AAD into the *Port Management Act 1995*. New s 91AAB provides that an owner of a cargo vessel that loads or unloads cargo at a prescribed commercial trading port must provide prescribed shipping information to Ports Victoria within a specific timeframe – failure to do so without reasonable excuse is an offence. Similarly, new s 91AAD of the Bill provides that an operator of a prescribed terminal within the port of Melbourne must provide prescribed information, relating to container

trucks accessing the terminal, to the Secretary to the Department of Transport and Planning within a specific time and in specified form, and failure to do so without reasonable excuse constitutes an offence.

By creating a 'reasonable excuse' exception, these offences place an evidential burden on the accused, in that they require the accused to raise evidence of a reasonable excuse, which is relevant to the right to be presumed innocent. However, in doing so, this offence does not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution to prove the essential elements of the offence. The Supreme Court has held that an evidential onus of this kind does not limit the right to be presumed innocent.

Accordingly, I consider clause 50 is compatible with the Charter.

#### Evidentiary presumptions

A number of clauses in the Bill contain a presumption that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, certain evidence amounts to proof of certain facts. The presumptions are relevant to the right to be presumed innocent because they facilitate the prosecution to establish the elements of an offence without being required to prove certain necessary facts to the legal standard, and place an onus on an accused to raise contrary evidence before a prosecution is required to prove these matters.

#### *Point to point speed averaging*

Part 2 of the Bill relates to point to point speed averaging for speeding offences in the Act or the *Road Safety Road Rules 2017*. Clause 7 inserts new ss 65AB and 65AC into the Act.

Section 65AB makes it an offence for a driver to exceed the average speed limit on the total length of road between two detection points, which is determined by a mathematical formula prescribed by new s 65AC. Several clauses of the Bill, such as 5, 6 and 13–20, amend the definitions of various offence provisions in the Act, or provisions that provide for specific sanctions such as immediate licence suspension, to include the offence of 'exceeding the average speed limit', so that such an offence is covered by these provisions.

New s 78AA inserted by clause 9 then provides that in proceedings for an offence against ss 64 or 65AB(1) of the Act, where the average speed at which a motor vehicle or trailer travelled is relevant, and where the prosecution relies on the average speed of the motor vehicle or trailer between two detection points on a total length of road, the average speed calculated in accordance with the mathematical formula in new s 78AA is evidence of the average speed at which the motor vehicle or trailer travelled, in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

New s 79B inserted by clause 11 of the Bill provides that where the speed limit applying to the length of road on which the motor vehicle or trailer travelled is indicated by a variable speed limit sign, and where the speed or average speed at which a motor vehicle or trailer travelled along the length of road is relevant, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the speed limit indicated by the variable speed limit sign on that occasion is proof of the speed limit that applies to the driver. If it is not practicable to determine the speed limit indicated by the variable speed limit sign on the relevant occasion, the speed limit is the greater of the speed limit that would normally apply to that length of road, or the maximum speed limit displayed by the variable speed limit sign at any time.

Clause 11 of the Bill also inserts new s 79C, which deems that a certificate issued by the Head, Transport for Victoria that certifies the maximum speed limit and indicated by a variable speed limit sign that applies to a length of road, is proof in any proceeding, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, of the facts and matters contained in it, namely the maximum speed limit. New s 79D, also inserted into the Act by clause 11 of the Bill, provides that in any criminal proceeding where the fact that a motor vehicle or trailer was present at a detection point on any occasion is relevant, evidence of that fact as indicated or determined on the relevant occasion by a prescribed road safety camera or an image or message produced by a prescribed road safety camera or by a prescribed process, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, is proof of the fact that the motor vehicle or trailer was present at the detection point on that occasion.

Division 2 of Part 2 of the Bill amends the *Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013* to also adopt similar changes in relation to point to point speed averaging in certain circumstances. For example, clause 24 inserts new s 32A which deems as fact (in the absence of evidence to the contrary) the average speed at which a heavy vehicle was travelling, as being the average speed the heavy vehicle was travelling on a length of road between two detection points, as determined by the mathematical formula outlined in subsection (3). Clause 26 inserts ss 34A and 34B which concern evidence of speed limits and maximum speed limits being indicated by a variable speed limit sign, and inserts new s 34C which deems as fact that a heavy vehicle was present at a detection point on any occasion where its presence was indicated by a prescribed road safety camera or an image or message produced by a prescribed road safety camera or by a prescribed process.

*Analysis*

These provisions are relevant to the presumption of innocence as they deem a fact to be proved in the absence of contrary evidence, and thus reduce the prosecution's burden to prove an accused's guilt.

To the extent that such deeming provisions limit this right, I consider any limits to be reasonably justified. These offences are important to upholding road safety and preventing public harm, with point to point speed averaging encouraging consistent, safer driving over long distances (rather than at specific, known camera locations). The deeming provisions are essential to facilitating the prosecution of such offences due to the evidentiary, logistical and legal difficulties of proving an average speed over a long distance or establishing the veracity of a camera image using traditional, manual evidence. These provisions also allow for the efficient prosecution of high volume offences that would otherwise overwhelm the court system if they required full and manual technical evidence to establish the veracity of every record produced by the cameras.

Further, these provisions allow an accused to challenge the evidence being deemed. Once a person has adduced some evidence to the contrary of the assumed fact, the burden of proof shifts to the prosecution to prove the necessary facts comprising the elements of the offence. Further, these provisions relate to the enforcement of offences to which it is appropriate to attach deeming provisions, being strict liability road safety offences, which are regulatory in nature, carry little stigma and a low prescribed penalty – and relate to maintaining the safe and orderly operation of the roads.

I am therefore of the view that these evidentiary presumption provisions are compatible with the right to be presumed innocent under s 25(1) of the Charter.

**The Hon. Melissa Horne MP**  
**Minister for Roads and Road Safety**  
**Minister for Ports and Freight**

*Second reading*

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:22): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:****Overview**

The Government continues to improve Victoria's vast transport network for today and the years ahead. We are focussed on embedding a strong culture of road safety and improving the effective management of roads across our state. We are also committed to supporting an efficient, safe and sustainable ports and freight transport system that enhances Victoria's economic prosperity and liveability. This Bill will amend the *Road Safety Act 1986* to enable the expansion of point-to-point average speed enforcement to improve road safety outcomes and reduce the number of lives lost. The Bill will also amend the *Road Management Act 2004* to introduce new powers to temporarily declare a road to provide certainty around road authority functions and responsibilities. This Bill will also implement key actions from the Victorian Freight Plan and make permanent existing temporary exemptions for Victorian emergency services under the Heavy Vehicle National Law. This Bill will also deliver technical amendments, improved processes and better administrative outcomes across a range of transport legislation.

**Road safety reforms**

In Victoria, speeding contributes to at least 30 per cent of road fatalities and a quarter of serious injuries sustained by light vehicle occupants each year. That is why the Victorian Government continues to support actions to improve road safety outcomes in line with the *Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–30*. This includes implementing better speed management practices to encourage safer driver behaviour by using stronger and smarter enforcement practices.

The Bill amends the *Road Safety Act 1986* to enable the expansion of point-to-point average speed enforcement to allow enforcement in high-risk, high-speed scenarios along lengths of road where there are multiple speed limits. Point-to-point average speed is based on a calculation of a vehicle's average speed between two known, fixed points known as detection points. Point-to-point average speed enforcement is currently used in a number of locations in Victoria, however the existing formula in the Road Safety Act for calculating a vehicle's average speed is limited in that the speed limit between the two detection points needs

to be the same across the entire length of road. This prevents average speed enforcement being used along lengths of road (or networks of roads) where there is more than one speed limit.

To overcome this limitation, the Bill amends the *Road Safety Act* to enable point-to-point average speed enforcement across multiple speed zones. The Bill introduces new formulas for both calculating the average speed limit that applies between two detection points that span different speed zones and calculating the average speed of a vehicle that has travelled between those two points. The Bill also introduces a new offence to the *Road Safety Act 1986* that a driver of a motor vehicle must not drive in a manner so that the average speed of the vehicle (as calculated) exceeds the average speed limit (as calculated) that applies on the total length of road between those specific detection points.

In some cases where temporary speed limits apply, for example, where a temporary speed sign is used for road works, the reduced speed limit would be disregarded and the maximum speed limit for that section of road would be the speed limit for the purposes of calculating a vehicle's average speed. Temporarily reduced speed limits could still be enforced through existing methods of detecting a vehicle's speed at a point in time, either by road safety cameras or by Victoria Police members.

The Government is also making changes to address concerns about the use of the operator onus scheme and to ensure responsible drivers are held accountable for their actions. The Bill amends the *Road Safety Act 1986* to ensure that it will be acceptable to use an Australian or overseas residential address when describing a person nominated in a statement. Under the operator onus scheme, the operator of the vehicle is held responsible for an offence unless that operator nominates the person who was driving the vehicle at the time of the offence. Currently, a home address for the responsible driver must be included in a nomination statement, which is defined in the *Road Safety Act 1986* as "the person's residential address or place of abode in Australia". This definition has enabled some authorities to refuse to accept nominations with overseas drivers addresses, which goes against the intention of the operator onus nature of these offences. The Bill amends the *Road Safety Act 1986* to replace the reference to home address with residential address to ensure that it will be acceptable to use an Australian or overseas residential address when describing a person nominated in a statement. Similar amendments are proposed to the *Melbourne City Link Act 1995*, the *Eastlink Project Act 2004*, the *West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019*, the *North East Link Act 2020* and the *Marine Safety Act 2010*.

To support this change, the Government will also amend the Road Safety (General) Regulations 2019 to require the provision of additional points of identification, for example, a passport number, where nomination statements are provided with an overseas address. This is intended to ease the burden on councils in locating and recovering infringement amounts from overseas drivers. In addition, the Bill amends the *Road Safety Act 1986* to adjust the period in which proceedings may commence for an offence of providing false or misleading information in statements provided to enforcement officials, including nomination statements. It can take a significant length of time to detect false statements made under the operator onus scheme, particularly where statements nominate a driver whose residential address is overseas. The Bill addresses this by extending the time to commence proceedings for this offence from 24 months to 3 years.

### **Road management reforms**

The Government is making improvements to ensure new roads can be effectively managed as soon as they are ready. There is often considerable pressure to open a road to the public once the construction phase reaches completion but before they have been formally declared to be roads under the *Road Management Act 2004*. As a result, roads are being used by the public without any road authority functions being formally assigned under that Act.

Road declarations require the completion of a number of steps, including negotiating and completing the acquisition of land in situations where not all of the land in the new road reserve is already owned by the state government. Further, accurate survey plans need to be undertaken by licensed surveyors and these cannot be done until construction of the road is mostly complete. This is due to the exact boundaries of the road, including key structures such as bridges, not being known until late in the construction process. For these reasons, it is often not possible to declare roads under the Road Management Act before they are open to the public.

The Bill amends the *Road Management Act 2004* to provide the Head, Transport for Victoria (HTfV) with a special power to temporarily declare and classify a road so that road authority responsibilities can be assigned while a full and permanent road declaration is still pending. This assignment of road authority responsibilities ensures there is an entity with legal responsibility for key functions such as the inspection, maintenance and repair of the new road. The assignment of a road authority for a new road that is being used by traffic also helps to address issues around liability in the event of incidents.

### **Implementing the Victorian Freight Plan**

In 2025, the Victorian Government released *The Victorian Freight Plan 2025–30: Victoria Delivers* – the Government’s plan to meet the challenge of higher freight volumes as Victoria’s population continues to grow and our demand for freight continues to increase. The vision for the plan is to protect and strengthen Victoria’s competitive advantage, to enhance Victoria’s liveability and economic prosperity. The plan outlines the high-level objectives, strategic priority areas and the actions that will be taken to deliver on the objectives over the next five years to support thriving freight and supply chains in Victoria. Two of the actions call for improved data sharing between Government and industry to support the performance and transparency of Victoria’s ports system. These two actions are addressed in this Bill.

The first action relates to improved oversight of port precinct truck activity. The Bill amends the *Port Management Act 1995* to require operators of prescribed terminals within the Port of Melbourne (stevedoring businesses) to collect prescribed information on trucks and truck activity to and from facilities and to share this information with the Department of Transport and Planning. The information is likely to include registration plate numbers, engine details, fuel type, vehicle age, frequency of access to the prescribed terminal and the quantity of containers collected and/or delivered. Stevedoring businesses already collect a range of information relating to the vehicle, and this new measure will build on this existing system. Failure to provide this information will be an offence, as will intentionally providing false or misleading information. This new requirement aims to improve the efficiency of truck activity in the area of the port and support policy development.

The second action relates to improved container shipping information. The Bill amends the *Port Management Act 1995* to insert a new provision requiring the owner of a cargo vessel that berths in a prescribed commercial port to supply prescribed information to the Department of Transport and Planning in accordance with the prescribed time, format and delivery method to be set out in regulations. The information is likely to include details of the characteristics, content, origin and destination of shipping containers. Failure to supply this information will be an offence, as will intentionally providing false or misleading information. At present, shipping companies operating across Victoria’s commercial ports provide container shipping information to Ports Victoria, container stevedoring terminal operators, and other entities along the freight supply chain, but the form of the information provided is not always consistent, creating inefficiencies in the supply chain. The new requirement will provide for consistent electronic container shipping information, which will be made available to industry. This measure aims to support more efficient movement of containers through the supply chain and further targeted policy development where needed.

### **Heavy Vehicle National Law exemptions**

The Bill amends the *Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013* to make permanent existing time-limited exemptions for emergency services from fatigue management requirements.

Victorian emergency services are currently exempt from some fatigue management record-keeping requirements under the Heavy Vehicle National Law. These exemptions are currently provided by a time-limited notice issued by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator.

To provide ongoing clarity and certainty, and to reduce burden on volunteers, the Bill amends the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013 (Vic) to make these exemptions permanent in Victorian legislation.

### **Other amendments to improve processes**

The Bill also makes other process and administrative amendments to improve the clarity and operation of these key pieces of transport legislation. These amendments include changes to the *Road Safety Act 1986* to reflect recent updates to the Road Safety Road Rules 2017 related to the wearing of seat belts and the need for passengers in vehicles to not occupy the same seating position. There are also changes to the *Rail Management Act 1996* to remove a requirement to consult when maximum rail access prices are maintained or increased by no more than the Consumer Price Index. The Bill also amends the *Port Management Act 1995* to clarify where and when local port managers can charge commercial rates of fees.

Other minor and technical governance changes include amendments to toll road legislation to update delegation requirements, allow toll road operators to execute a deed without the use of an official seal, remove redundant road management provisions and transfer administrative functions from the Secretary to the Head, Transport for Victoria. These amendments relate to the *North East Link Act 2020*, *Melbourne City Link Act 1995*, *EastLink Project Act 2004*, and *West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019*, as well as the *Transport Integration Act 2010*.

### **Conclusion**

This Bill reflects the Victorian Government’s continued commitment to improving our transport network and reinforcing Victoria’s position as the freight and logistics centre of Australia. The Bill will improve road

safety outcomes and the management of Victoria's roads, implement actions from the Victorian Freight Plan, and deliver improved processes and administrative outcomes across a range of transport legislation.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (10:23): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 16 April.**

**Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**And David Southwick's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has allowed for proper consultation with the industry to occur.'

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (10:23): I am pleased to continue the contribution that I got a brief opportunity to commence last night and go to what is a key piece of reform when it comes to building and housing within our state. As I was saying last night, this is an opportunity to make some serious reforms when it comes to the building industry. The announcements that have been made, many of which have been well canvassed in this place, outside of this place and of course within the media and local communities, go to I think the position of the government's housing strategy and the statement about providing more supply to the market at a time when significant pressures are being experienced, not just in our state but across the country and indeed across the globe. With what we are subject to, there is no more timely position than now to be able to see those external forces, whether they be the conditions currently being experienced in the Middle East due to the conflict or many of the issues that have been well canvassed over the last couple of decades. Whether you go to the GFC, whether you look at the pandemic, whether you now look at the war in the Middle East, those circumstances do indeed change conditions that we experience on the ground.

What we have been focused on as a government is being able to provide for a more robust, more beefed-up system whereby residents within our community can get an opportunity to build a house and make renovations to a home with confidence, and making sure that we are able to do that is something that is really important. The reforms that are in the bill before us this morning – and carried over of course from last night's debate – go to making for a better system, and that is as a result of many of the experiences that members of this chamber have listened to. They have worked with constituents, worked with communities and worked with families. The concerns that have been raised go to the government's position, which is about creating a better system. If we are able to do that, if we are able to provide more confidence and an ability for those that want to get into the housing market and those that might be changing their current housing arrangements to do so, that is something that is really important.

If you look through the journey of the housing statement and the work that has been done, I am sure, certainly on this side of the house, there is a significant recognition of the amount of work that has been done. This builds upon those announcements that I referred to earlier by the Premier and the Minister for Planning, which go to not only providing more supply but providing more supply in the right places; leveraging the existing commitments that this government has made, particularly in transport, with the delivery of the Metro Tunnel and the delivery of the West Gate Tunnel; removing nearly 90 dangerous and congested level crossings across the state; and making for provisions for a future Suburban Rail Loop. We have got an opportunity to be able to leverage those commitments,

those investments, and that is something that we are focused on and that is something that we remain committed to. What we see from those opposite is some sort of policy that completely ignores all of the needs of local communities when it comes to transport, to access to jobs, to opportunities, to training, to health, to education. But we remain practically committed to progress. Being able to do that means that we are enabling people to get an opportunity to move into a place that may be close to family and friends, that may be connected to public transport, and that indeed helps people get around safer and sooner.

Just this morning at the Sunbury station, as I was lined up to grab a coffee as I was about to jump on the train, a constituent said to me, 'Were you at Parkville station on Tuesday?' I said that I was actually, and she said to me that she is a nurse and is now getting on at Sunbury, getting off at Parkville, and it saves her 30 minutes on her daily commute. She gave me some feedback about how she was a bit frustrated during construction of the project but, now that that station is open, how pleased she is that she has the opportunity to commute in and out of the city from Sunbury to Parkville, the doorstep of our amazing hospital precinct.

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Josh BULL:** Absolutely, member for Melton. I think that is the story in itself. The ability to do that and open up that Parkville precinct and all of the other areas that we have been able to do through the construction of the Metro Tunnel relates specifically to the housing statement and the ability of the government's to unlock those areas. Those opposite have what is an ideological position on housing and opportunity. We deal with the practical reality of people's decision-making each and every day in what is an increasingly complex world. We have got an opportunity through this bill, the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, via the establishment of a new principal act for integrated administration and enforcement of the building legislation into the building system and the establishment, as others have mentioned, of the Building and Plumbing Commission as the successor to the Victoria Building Authority, to provide for a more robust, fairer and better system. This of course is the work that I say quite often is ever and ongoing. We want to make sure that we get this system as fair and as decent and as practical as possible, and we remain committed to that. We will not be spending our time driven by some sort of wild ideology that does not deal with those practical pressures that local families face each and every day.

The work that has been done on this bill is significant and important, and it builds upon those broader reforms that I mentioned earlier. To be able to reflect on the stories, the experiences and the challenges that local communities face when they talk about housing and all of the pressures that I mentioned earlier – whether they be global, national or indeed local – we need to make sure that we are doing everything we can to make housing fairer, safer, better and easier. Certainly creating those opportunities via this bill and, as in the earlier comments I made, the Premier and the Minister for Planning's work is something that we remain committed to and, I think, really important work that the government will continue to do. We reserve the right of course to come back, to make changes, to make it better and fairer, and that is something that we will keep doing each and every day. I do want to thank all of those that have put significant work into this. I am confident, reading through the bill and the mechanisms and the initiatives that are within the legislation, that this is going to be an important bill that is going to make a genuine difference on the ground, and that is what matters. I commend the bill to the house.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (10:32): I rise to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. This is a very important bill, and one that goes to the heart of something that every Victorian relies on, which is confidence in the homes that we build, buy and live in. At the outset, the opposition acknowledges the very real and serious failures within Victoria's building system. For far too long we have seen poor-quality construction, defective buildings, combustible cladding risks and a regulatory framework that has been fragmented, slow to act and too often ineffective. There is no doubt that on this side of the house we want to see better protections, but we also want to see more housing being built and not further restraints to doing so. Consumers must

be protected from debilitating debt and heartbreak when things go wrong. Whether Victorians are purchasing or renting, they should be able to do so with confidence that they will be moving into a safe and high-quality home which is free from costly defects.

The majority of tradies, builders and plumbers who work day in and day out in the industry do it with pride, professionalism and high standards of quality and integrity. But there is unfortunately a small number of tradies within the industry that need to face consequences to deter them from undermining hardworking builders in the industry. We know that confidence in the building industry and the system itself has been badly shaken, and reform is necessary. Across the state over time we have seen serious defects, poor construction practices and builders collapse, which has eroded trust in the industry. When the system fails, families are left with unsafe or defective homes, cost blowouts and disputes that can drag on for years, and trust in the entire industry collapses. But you cannot just ram a bill through without adequate consultation and in just two weeks.

My question is: does this bill address the current housing crisis and build more homes? As our lead speaker the member for Caulfield raised, this is a bill that has significant implications and constraints that directly reduce the opportunity to build more homes, including increased costs and significant impacts on the building industry. I support the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Caulfield. The bill needs further consultation, including with the industries that are going to be significantly impacted by this legislation, and consideration of the impact that will have on reducing the number of houses being built.

You would think that it would be a given that the building industries and other stakeholders directly impacted by this bill would be given the opportunity to have their say. We should be depending on their feedback and acknowledging their expertise and the importance of having the right information needed to make this bill a success and make the changes needed without having a negative impact on the building industry and allow thorough consultation. The Housing Industry Association, HIA, have expressed their concern with the bill. They are requesting that the second reading of the bill be delayed so that the industry can properly consider the bill and the impacts it might have on the broader industry. They have said that this bill is substantial and not merely administrative, despite being described as a restatement of existing legislation. It introduces significant changes, particularly to disciplinary sanctions and enforcement powers. There are concerns about maintaining procedural fairness, given increased regulatory activity in recent years. Industry stakeholders need adequate time to review and understand the bill's implications.

Master Builders Victoria have reported that their members indicated that these legislative changes contained in this bill could in fact increase construction costs by 10 to 30 per cent. This should ring alarm bells. House construction prices have increased by over 40 per cent since 2020 already. Forty-three per cent of the cost of a new home is taxes, fees and levies. They also said, while there is support for stronger consumer protections and actions against poor practice, the bill represents a substantial expansion of regulatory control, increased compliance obligations, enforcement powers and direct liabilities, significantly raising financial considerations and operational and personal risks for builders. The cumulative impact of reforms, rising costs and fixed-price contract pressures is likely to reduce builder capacity, increase insolvencies and constrain housing supply. They also raised that small and medium builders are particularly exposed, with risks of reduced participation, stalled growth or market exit, and that the consolidation of powers within the Building and Plumbing Commission increases the risk that a single regulatory decision could severely disrupt or end a business. We cannot afford to lose businesses during this housing crisis.

The Victorian Forest Products Association believes that this bill is an opportunity to strengthen accountability for compliance with building standards, including imported timber products. They have some concerns around imported products meeting Australian standards, impacting quality and safety, and are calling for further investigation and support measures for improving confidence in building materials without adding unnecessary regulatory burdens or delays – something that is needed and should be considered.

The bill is being presented as reform, but what we are seeing is not balanced reform. It is a rushed, heavy-handed expansion of power without proper consultation, without adequate preparation and without accountability for past failures. The bill restructures Victoria's building and plumbing regulatory framework by consolidating administrative, enforcement and discipline provisions that are currently contained across multiple acts into a single legacy framework. The government claims this new regulator will be capable of handling a surge of complaints, yet the reality is it is already struggling under the weight of existing demand. If it cannot manage the system as it stands today, how can we expect it to succeed under an even broader and more complex mandate? Let us be clear: the very issues this bill seeks to address – defects, cladding failures and weak oversight – all occurred on the government's watch. And now, instead of fixing the root causes, the response is simply more power, more penalties and more burden placed on builders and a significant lack of consultation. This is not a minor adjustment, it is a systemwide overhaul. Yet stakeholders have been given no meaningful time to understand its implications. This is not good governance; this is a government rushing legislation – important legislation impacting significantly on the building industry and housing.

This bill centralises sweeping enforcement powers into a single regulator, expands penalties, increases direct liability and concentrates authority in a way that is deeply concerning. That is not balanced reform, that is unchecked power. We are told this bill targets bad traders, but the reality is it risks impacting on compliant builders – the very people we rely on to deliver housing across the state. The thresholds are unclear, the safeguards are weak and there is no compelling evidence that this approach will effectively deal with rogue operators. At a time when the construction sector is already under immense pressure, with rising costs, supply chain disruptions and critical workforce shortages, this government is choosing to pile on more regulation without fair consultation. Instead of supporting the industry, it is ignoring it, and it should be restoring confidence. All this is doing is creating uncertainty and concerns across the sector. Instead of delivering real reform, it is repeating the same mistakes. This is why we are moving a reasoned amendment to ensure this Parliament takes the time to properly scrutinise this legislation and to ensure the voices of the industry are heard.

The government promised to build 800,000 homes over 10 years to fix the housing crisis, but the reality is that the government are well below their target and they are failing in addressing the housing crisis in this state. We are in the midst of a housing crisis, and we should be doing all that we can to ensure that more homes are built and to get more people into homes, not putting the industry at risk. Since coming into office Labor has introduced or increased more than 30 property-related taxes. The cost of building in this state has made building a house unaffordable. The increased land tax has seen people sell up because it is no longer viable to own a rental property in this state, reducing the rental market significantly.

We desperately need to address the housing crisis and the current housing failings of this government. Victoria is in the midst of a housing crisis, and despite billions of dollars committed the outcomes are falling well short. We know wait times for vulnerable people, including those escaping family violence, can stretch up to nearly two years, and we know that even after the Big Housing Build is complete Victoria will still have one of the lowest proportions of social housing in this country. In communities like Shepparton that means fewer rentals, higher prices and more people locked out of housing altogether.

In regional communities like Shepparton the building industry faces challenges, workforce shortages, rising costs, regulatory burden and supply chain challenges, all of which slow housing delivery and can make it harder for families to get into a home. We cannot add further restraints. I get so frustrated when we stand in this place and have the opportunity to discuss building more housing to see that we are constantly going backwards. Until this government gets serious about delivering planning reform and restoring confidence to build, Victorians will continue to face this current housing crisis. This bill is not doing that. It is making building harder and more costly, and what makes me angry is the \$15 billion that has been wasted in rorts on the Big Build sites that should have gone into housing to get those who are homeless off our streets and into homes.

My electorate is in the midst of a housing and rental crisis. It is real, and we have one of the highest rates of homelessness in regional Victoria. It is becoming more visible, with more people sleeping rough, people sleeping down on the river and mothers with their children in cars. This is not the country I grew up in. We know how we have got to this, with this government wasting billions and not prioritising housing. As a region alone, local services are reporting long waiting lists, with more than 2474 people on the public housing waiting list, reflecting significant shortages and housing stress. There is so much more that we need to be doing, and we cannot sit on our hands. This was an opportunity to have reform that could help build more homes, and that will not happen under this bill.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (10:42): I rise to contribute on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. Of course it is a very important bill, and important not only for Victoria but particularly for an electorate like mine, Melton, which is one of the fastest growing areas in the state, if not the country. Within the next 20 years we will double our population to 450,000 in Melton, and between Melton and Wyndham by 2046 there will be a million people living in that corridor, which will be one-tenth of the Victorian population. So you can see why housing in my electorate and the western suburbs is so important. People in Melton do not just talk about housing, they are building, and they are coming out to Melton because it is still affordable, and they are buying their first home. They are sometimes stretching every dollar that they have got to get into the market, and of course they are starting their families. It is a very young population and demographic in Melton, and as I said, they are buying their first homes because they think it is an affordable area. It is only 31 kilometres from the centre of the Melbourne business district, and it is a great place for people to move into. It is quite a diverse community that we have got out there now, and many of those members of that diverse community are coming out where friends and relatives are living.

Something that we see in my electorate office very often is when people come in and raise concerns about housing, issues of builders and things like that, and obviously when things have broken down in regard to the building of their homes, the defects and things like that and trying to get them rectified. Of course it is quite heartbreaking for people when they have to go through those battles to get some of the building defects and construction issues sorted out, and that is what this bill is all about. It is so heartbreaking for hardworking people, families who have done everything right, scraping together their deposits for a home, signing contracts in good faith and trusting that the system will deliver what they have paid for and a good standard of build for what they have paid for only to be let down by a dodgy operator who is more focused on profits than people. We see that too often with some of these dodgy builders, and that is what this bill will address. This bill is about restoring confidence within our communities, and it is about making sure that when people such as in my electorate of Melton or across Victoria build or buy a home they are not left on their own if something goes wrong and that they will be supported by a well-structured system.

It is outlined in the bill summary that this legislation establishes a new principal act and strengthens enforcement across the building system, including formally establishing the Building and Plumbing Commission as a stronger integrated regulator. The system has long been fragmented; it has been confusing and often too weak when it comes to dealing with those who deliberately do the wrong thing. I have seen that firsthand with some of the people that have come into my electorate office, but hopefully this bill will change all of that. It also introduces for the first time a clear building system objective, putting consumers at the centre and making it explicit that health and safety must come first, which is great to see. It is not just symbolic; it is a fundamental shift in how decisions are made, how regulation is applied and how accountability is enforced. It strengthens enforcement powers. It gives the regulator real teeth. It provides for stronger investigation powers. It gives them the ability to intervene earlier and the capacity to impose meaningful consequences if serious breaches occur. Obviously too many of these dodgy operators have not been held to account. It is quite clear that most builders and tradies, I am pleased to say, do the right thing – there are only a few that do not. Most builders and tradies are proud of their work, and it is great to see that. They want to show off their good outcomes and their good product. That is great to see, especially when they hand over the keys to a house that has been finished. They really want to show it off, which is terrific, because it is a good

selling point and it is a good promotion for them to build more and more houses and to show the good quality work that they do.

Unfortunately, the minority of dodgy builders at times make it very difficult for the genuinely good builders and tradies. It only takes a small number of those bad ones to make it really difficult. That is why stronger enforcement matters, and that is why civil penalties matter: to make sure that these dodgy ones do not get away with it. It is about holding company directors to account. This is why cracking down on phoenixing – the practice of shutting down one company and then reopening under another name to avoid consequences – is so important. We have seen that quite a bit when that has happened in the past. A dodgy builder has shut down their company and they have wandered off, and then next thing you know they are practising under another name and continuing to build dodgy builds. Cutting corners and ripping people off is not the way to go, of course. Just masking yourself and hiding yourself under a different name for a build is terrible. I have firsthand knowledge of a particular area; it actually happened in Bacchus Marsh to a young woman when there were some issues with the building of her house and she just came up against roadblocks all the time to try and get it rectified. In particular, at times she has been intimidated and harassed by the builders of her particular house. This is a young woman on her own that came out of a domestic violence situation, and it has been very difficult for her to deal with the issues.

This bill is not just about protecting homebuyers; it is also about protecting subcontractors and small businesses, the people who are out there every day working their guts out to build something for themselves and their families. In Melton we have seen strong growth not just in housing but in small businesses. I note recently that in the Melton LGA there were 18,793 small businesses and it achieved a growth rate of 9.8 per cent, which is the highest in Victoria. It is pleasing to see that people are starting up their businesses in Melton. Again, as I come back to the diversity of our community and the diversity of businesses now that are in Melton, it is great to see.

A lot of these people have come through our strong TAFE system. They have learned their skills through TAFE, and they have honed their craft through TAFE. Now they are contributing strongly to our economy and our community out there in the west. Victoria's TAFE system has delivered generations of skilled tradespeople and people who take pride in what they do and want to help build quality homes using the quality skills that they have learned through the TAFE system. That pipeline of skilled workers will only become more important as our community continues to grow.

I have got to give a shout-out: we will be starting to build the new Kangan TAFE out at Melton later this year, to be completed by 2028. Primarily the courses that they will be teaching at Kangan TAFE in Melton will be construction courses and construction training, and that will go a long way to assisting us with the massive growth of housing in Melton. Over the next 20 years 109,000 houses are to be built in Melton. Currently there are only 89,000 houses in Melton. There are going to be another 109,000, so you can see the pressure is on in that western corridor. I am sure it is very similar to what is happening in Wyndham. That is why I said in the next 20 years we will see a million people in that corridor, and that is why housing is so important out there. That Kangan TAFE facility will be training up 600 apprentices every year to deliver their construction trades and to assist us in building those houses, which is terrific to see.

As I said, this bill is very important in regard to securing the process and the system here in Victoria. I do not support the reasoned amendment put up by the opposition. I think it is really just a way of opposing reform and delaying and watering down this particular bill. It is standing in the way of stronger protections, and I do not support the reasoned amendment. I do not think it is a way of standing up for the consumers and for home builders and for tradies in delaying the bill through the reasoned amendment. This is a really important bill, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:52): I am always more than happy to rise in this place to talk about housing, so the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 gives me another opportunity this week to do so. This is one of those bills that we will talk about. I can read the tea

leaves on this one, and we will refer to this bill down the track when builders have left the industry and plumbers have left the industry because it has just got too hard for them.

There are certain people in this place who I go to for certain pieces of advice and certain counsel, and the people that I turn to with regard to building and plumbing are on my right and my left in this place. The member for Narracan spoke on this bill yesterday, and as a builder, he knows a thing or two about the impact that this bill will have. To my left, the member for Morwell, as a plumber, knows a thing or two about the impact of this. He also spoke on this bill yesterday. They both support the member for Caulfield's reasoned amendment on this bill, and that is to delay it and at least properly consider the bill and the impacts it will have on the building industry and consult with the major stakeholders here – those that actually know how to build a house, which way to hold a hammer, although I suspect it has been quite some time since the member for Narracan has held a hammer and actually used it; there would not be a callus that adorns his palms or his fingers of late, I would suspect. The member for Morwell, on the other hand, I know is still very handy with a spanner and pipes.

The Housing Industry Association (HIA), we know, was one of the major key stakeholders that requested a delay to the second reading of this bill to allow for the industry to properly consider the impacts, like I said. It is substantial. This is not merely an administrative bill, despite being described as a restatement of existing legislation. It is not. It is going to make building houses and those completely unrealistic housing targets of 80,000 a year – they are unachievable at the moment; we are around 30,000 short as it is – completely unachievable. Builders have multiple different builds going on at once, and the restrictions that this bill will then put on them will kill mum-and-dad businesses, they really will.

I said yesterday when talking about the cladding bill that in the country, in rural Victoria, we have started to see the return of young families coming back to small towns. That includes a builder in Ouyen, which is fabulous because we have not had a builder. They usually have to travel from Mildura, which is an hour away. It is the same thing for towns like Robinvale. They usually do not reside in those towns – for good reason – as there is not normally enough work for them there. However, there was a gap in Ouyen. Eighteen houses were constructed there in 2024, so a gap was identified. Gee whiz, there is some money to be made there with families moving back and construction to start, so he did that. This bill has the real danger of making his business unviable. Cash flow is really important in any business. This bill will put a stranglehold on that family's business in Ouyen and the ability for more family homes to be constructed to attract people back to towns like Ouyen.

There are always different ways to construct housing. There are businesses coming out with different innovations. If you will indulge me for just a second, I was speaking to an old friend a week or so ago, who is one with an entrepreneurial spirit and very, very clever who had again identified a gap. This is often what happens. If there is a gap in the market, the private sector often fills it, particularly when we have so many entrepreneurs in this state. I was talking to this old friend, and he was talking about this prefab housing project. In my mind I thought of prefab housing like workers accommodation – dongas, if you will – which are multi one-bedroom sorts of rooms. A lot of the time they are 3 by 3 or 3 by 9. They are not great. But I got talking to him. The name of the business, or the company, is ALTA Systems Pty Ltd. They have actually started doing a five-house project. These houses take literally days to construct because they come sort of flat packed from overseas. They import them from China. If you are looking for a website at the moment, you will not find one. They are still in the development stage and have not got a website yet, but it takes days for them to construct homes. They are doing five houses at the moment in Byron Bay. They have just completed one in Swan Hill, which is kind of their little pet project, if you want to have a look at it. When I said I thought these housing systems were going to be like the old Jayco cabins or something similar to that, I was very, very wrong. Ray White Swan Hill actually have one for sale at the moment at 12 Wanera Street; \$799,000 is the guide. It is actually under offer. I looked at this and I thought, 'My goodness – that kind of construction in five days.' It meets everything and is 100 per cent compliant.

There is more development to go, because you still need a sparky; sparkies are very qualified. But it is one of those things that could help the government, or any government coming to power in November, to actually hit some housing targets, particularly if they could construct these things in a matter of days. There are some that take, depending on how many bedrooms they are, up to three months. But could you imagine going from the planning stage to the move-in stage in three months – 90 days? That is amazing. And just so you are aware, the more of them they build, the cheaper they get. Volume – who knew? It is one of those things. Again, these are little flat-packed prefab housing systems that are shipped over here. It is incredible, so watch this space for that. That is a gap in the market that has been filled by a group of young entrepreneurial businesspeople who could help solve the housing crisis in this state. But what will not is this bill.

As the Master Builders Association, HIA and several others have pointed out, it is fraught with danger. It will only make building homes and actually running a small construction company even harder for builders. I suppose one of the gifts – and there are many – of living in regional and rural Victoria is that you know who your builders are. That luxury is not afforded to those, perhaps, that live in the city. Because of the tight-knit communities, you know your builders – you know the good ones, you know the not-so-good ones. And for plumbers it is exactly the same. If any of them are dodgy, what happens? They get run out of town. There is simply no room for dodgy operators to run in smaller regional and rural communities. So although this gift is not afforded to those in metropolitan Victoria, it is certainly a gift in the regions. I did not actually know the term ‘phoenixing’ was a thing – where you shut down one business and start another. I had no idea that was a thing. It is not just the building and construction industry, though – this happens quite often. I did not know that was the word. I knew it happened, but I did not know that was the word for it.

To wrap things up – again, you will be surprised to learn that I was going to keep it short, and that has not actually happened, surprise, surprise. The minister at the table, the Minister for Climate Action, is also very surprised that I have not managed to keep it short. But we do support the member for Caulfield’s reasoned amendment on this bill and insist that there is actual key stakeholder engagement – like the HIA and the Master Builders – and that they listen to people that actually know how to work a hammer.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (11:02): I am pleased to rise and speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. When I read through this legislation and thought about what I was going to talk about today, there was a really key moment that came to mind. It was actually a couple of years ago. I was out in my van doing my mobile office, and I was in Bacchus Marsh. A gentleman came to see me, and he was genuinely really worried for his daughter. They were about to build a house, they were about to enter into contracts and they just felt incredibly insecure about that prospect. I remember ringing him back and telling him about the minimum financial requirements, and that made him very happy, because that was one of the things that he had been concerned about. But of course, what he was really concerned about for his daughter was that they would build something and find that it was defective.

I think we all know in this place that probably one of the biggest and most important things that we can do is that first home that we own, or for some people, first home that they build. Really, people need to have the confidence that when they take someone on that person will do a good job. I know it can be very difficult in such a big market. I have been lucky enough to have an absolutely wonderful builder who has been working on some renovations for me. At the heart of that relationship is trust. I have worked with him before, and I know that I can completely trust him – Sims building in Ballan; I would highly recommend them to anyone. I guess what I am trying to say is that I have had a one-on-one relationship with him, and so that trust has been established. But so many people are going into what is really the biggest contract they will probably ever sign, and they need to know that they can trust the person that they are asking to build their dream – quite literally build their dream.

This bill is incredibly important. I think what I am so pleased about is that it puts protecting Victorian families right at its centre. It is one of the really important elements of this bill – to make sure that

health and safety are right there at the base of any of those contracts. I find it pretty extraordinary to listen to those on the other side who are claiming that this is going to destroy the building industry. What I cannot understand is their willingness or their desire to protect dodgy builders, because at its heart that is what this bill is about – protecting consumers from dodgy builders. They seem to think that this is going to impact the entire industry. Well, the fact of the matter is that anyone who comes before the Building and Plumbing Commission is going to be there for a real reason, which is that they have delivered defective works, and why those on the other side feel that they need protection is extraordinary. Really, I thought we were all here in this place to protect the people of Victoria, but again we see that those on the other side have interests in large lobby groups which seem to be more important than the interests of Victorian families.

This bill is the first really comprehensive overhaul of the system since the act was introduced 30 years ago, and I think everyone in this room would acknowledge that a lot has happened within that industry but within our communities as well in those 30 years, so it really is time to usher in a new era with a principal act and a transformed regulator in the Building and Plumbing Commission. I know in my wonderful electorate of Eureka there are some real growth areas – Bacchus Marsh of course and West Maddingley are growing at a really, really quick rate. There are people coming into our communities, and we welcome them. We welcome people coming into our communities, but I want them to come into our community and know that they have a safe house to live in and that they will not be checking for defects in the years to come. To all of those people that are moving into West Maddingley, this bill is for you. This bill is to protect you and make sure that when you enter into those contracts you really are having something substantial delivered. I know that Cladding Safety with some of their work suggested that of the buildings that they inspected, 50 per cent had non-cladding defects, and it is pretty terrifying to think that volume of defects is out there. Even more concerning was that 78 per cent of those were less than 10 years old, and that really speaks to the point that the legislation has not been changed in 30 years and clearly practices have changed. If we are seeing that 78 per cent of those defective buildings were built in the last 10 years, it means something is wrong with the system and that we really need to address this right now, and that is what this bill does.

The main purpose is to deliver a principal act for building and plumbing that will sit at the core of a contemporary integrated legislative system. What is really good in the bill is that it provides a regulator with real teeth. Obviously, there have been consumer protections all along, but now to have a regulator that really has the power to enforce and remedy defects is a wonderful thing. I think it integrates all of those services. It also means that people have one place to go to so when they are seeing defects in their builds, they know that they have got one regulator that they can go to. It combines regulation insurance and dispute resolution. What that means for families building a home is that there are real clarity, accountability and transparency, and that is exactly what we need.

Of course there will be stronger enforcement. The bill enhances inspection and investigation powers and introduces early intervention tools. I really cannot understand why those on the other side would object to a bill that provides a regulator the opportunity for early intervention, because we know that to remedy defects after the fact is incredibly expensive, not to mention traumatic for the families involved. But it is very expensive, so it is important to have that early intervention tool within these new powers. It also introduces significant financial penalties. Those on the other side are suggesting that that is going to be difficult for the building industry, but I would say to them that we need those penalties to be strong and enforceable. We need that for the very safety and security of all of those people that are embarking on what should be an incredibly happy and joyous part of their lives: building their home, building their dream. As I say, this bill really goes towards putting them at the centre of it. Accountability requires liability, and part of the bill will hold directors accountable and will tackle phoenixing and corporate avoidance. That is something that is really heartbreaking to see for families when they have gone through a collapse. To see those same people pop up again in another guise is nothing short of traumatic for a family that have seen their dreams quashed.

Certainly, as I say, in Eureka there is a lot of building going on in Bacchus Marsh and West Maddingley but also in Teesdale just on the outskirts of Geelong. It is one of the fastest growing areas in the Golden Plains shire, and it is for those families that this bill has come to this Parliament. Those on the other side would like to protect the lobby groups and businesses that they are referring to. We on this side put Victorians at the centre of everything we do, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (11:12): It is my pleasure to rise on the Building and Plumbing Administration Enforcement Bill 2026. As other members have said, it does give us an opportunity to talk about not only building but housing, which is something that is on the minds of not only us here in Victoria on a daily basis but the whole nation and probably a lot of the world. But let us stick to Victoria for now. To take up some of the points that I have heard over the last day, it is fair to clarify beyond doubt that when members on any side of this house refer to dodgy builders, we are not referring to every builder being dodgy – it is not the same. I did hear in passing yesterday the suggestion that the government is suggesting all builders are dodgy, which is completely wrong. I guess it is a bit of a George Costanza thing, if I can paraphrase that: ‘It’s not a fabrication if you believe it.’

**Pauline Richards** interjected.

**Matt FREGON**: Thank you, member for Cranbourne, I will try and keep the dad jokes out of it, but it is a personal misfortune of mine. Back to the bill, housing is the biggest investment that most of us will ever make, whether we are building or whether we are renovating. Bec and I renovated last year. On the grounds that we have excellent builders in this state – many of them – I will give a big shout-out to John Kennedy Plumbing and Building. Yes, that is John Kennedy from Hawthorn, so he is doubly awesome. They were fantastic. Rob Adam, who was our project manager, is a good, local Mount Waverley boy – fantastic job. But when you are doing a build like we were doing with our renovation – which we are very, very happy with – little things crop up in the normal scheme of things. If you have a good builder that you have a good relationship with, when these little things come up – it might be some scope creep, it might be changes or it might be something does not look how you thought it was going to look or something not working as you expect – you work on that during the process. But not all consumers of the industry are as fortunate as Bec and I were with our renovators. If that relationship breaks down, it makes perfect sense that the Building and Plumbing Commission are able to intervene at an early stage.

One of the other things that we have introduced over the last couple of years is Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria, which is a key part of this. I have had a couple of emails from constituents over the last few months – and I will not name the people, because I have not told them that I would mention them, so that is not fair; and I will not mention the builder because that is equally not fair. But they have had an issue with a build in Mount Waverley. The relationship broke down with the builder, and they contacted my office trying to get some assistance. We pointed them to the DBDRV, and they went through that conciliation process. In a perfect world, you go through the conciliation process, like they did, the builder says, ‘All right. I’ll fix this. I’ll fix that,’ and DBDRV says, ‘All right, you’ve got a month to do it.’ Again, in a perfect world, with a builder who is just trying to get everything done and fixed and do the right thing, it would work. I found out even just this week that the builder in this case has not done what they said they would do in conciliation.

It is fair to say that part of the reason we have this bill in front of us today is because the former Victorian Building Authority (VBA) did not have the teeth that it needed to clamp down on builders who do the wrong thing, so that is why we are addressing this. For those that say this is going to kill the building industry – well, George Costanza. If you are not part of the problem, you probably do not have anything to concern yourself with. If you are trying to be part of the solution, again, you are not going to have to suffer the consequences that some builders who refuse to remedy the problem will. We will be doing our best to help out constituents, again, with dispute resolution, to see what the next steps are and how that goes for them.

Interestingly, I had another email from a separate constituent with another builder problem – same builder. This is part of the problem. I think the member for Mildura mentioned – rightly so, I am not having a go at you. Sorry, Speaker, my mistake there; I will try to follow the standing orders. But builders have multiple builds at the same time. I am sure it is very difficult – and I have great respect for our building community – to juggle all of that, to have the contractors in, to have the tradies in at the right time. I am sure that is very complicated; I have no doubt. But if you have a builder who is doing the wrong thing, that means they have also probably got many builds on at the same time, and if they are doing the wrong thing many times you have got multiple people who are at the whim of bad practice. So surely it is the government's role – any government's – to enforce those regulations to clamp down on those who are doing the wrong thing, and that is why we are here today. That is what we are debating.

I noticed the reasoned amendment, and I have no doubt the Housing Industry Association have questions – good on them. I have questions about their 43 per cent tax figure, but anyway. Again, delay – I mean, come on. We have been talking about these issues – before the VBA, dispute resolution, phoenixing – and addressing them as we go for as many years as I have been in this place, so delay is not required in my opinion; obviously we will agree to disagree on that with the other side of the chamber.

The other thing I would go to in closing is that this bill comes into play when people have already made those investments. We talk about a housing crisis, and there will be different views in this chamber on whose fault it is and all this sort of stuff, but we on this side of the chamber are doing what we can to work on supply, which is the main thing that a state government can do. A lot of the levers that are available or have led us to this point in time are federal, and I am interested to see the conversations in the paper about a potential capital gains tax discount change. I think that is a conversation this country needs to have. I have said before in this house Bec and I were lucky enough to buy our first place in 1999, shortly after those changes were made, and from an asset point of view we have done very well. The problem with it, though, is that not everyone is as fortunate as people who happened to buy shortly after those changes were made and rode the wave, and you end up with a generation following us who look at the size of the hill ahead of them to get equity under their feet for their future and their children's future and it is unobtainable.

In the 30 seconds I have, I remember a guy, Marcus – I cannot remember his surname – who does the financial report on the ABC. A number of years ago he just made this throwaway comment and it stopped me in my tracks. Talking about just finances, he said, 'Well, of course you can't make wealth from just working for a living anymore.' Think about that. The average Australian, in this guy's opinion – and he knows his finances – cannot make wealth from working anymore.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (11:22): On those profound remarks – and I agree, that is a very interesting comment, previous member – I am very pleased to rise and speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. We have heard quite a few interesting anecdotes from those across the house, and I will get to those in a second as far as having an agency with teeth goes. But this bill is indeed about one thing above all else, and that is protecting Victorian families. For most people in Frankston and indeed Victoria, making the purchase of a home, or building and buying a home, is the biggest investment of their lives. It is the biggest financial decision they might ever make, and when that investment goes wrong, when we see defects, delays or builder collapses or phoenixing, the consequences are absolutely devastating. I am amongst the many MPs in this place that are representing people in their communities that have their own stories, explaining what they went through, especially in those areas of high population growth and increasing housing demand as well.

It is I think the most comprehensive overhaul of the system since the Building Act 1993 was introduced over 30 years ago, and the scale of change in the building and plumbing industries since that act was introduced in 1993 is absolutely immense. Now is definitely the time to usher in a new era with a new principal act and a transformed regulator in the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC). I agree

and wholeheartedly concur with those who have stood up and said it is not the time to delay this. Speaking on behalf of my constituents, which is at the heart of my role, I would ask everybody to ask themselves if any of their constituents want a building regulator with more teeth – protection for Victorian families – delayed, because I do not think anyone is hearing that. It is fine for some peak bodies and stakeholders to say that, but we are here to represent our communities first and foremost.

On this bill the opposition seem to be pulling some figures – well, I will be polite and say from thin air. Their claims about cost increases for businesses due to the National Construction Code and due to these reforms I think are up for interpretation. I think those opposite need to be reminded that every single time we bring in consumer-focused reforms in this portfolio which will protect Victorian families from potentially debilitating and life-changing debts which can be incurred when they are left on their own when dodgy builders have their way, they are the ones that stand in the way of these reforms. It is very, very clear that a Labor government, this Labor government, fights for working Victorians while the Liberals consistently leave Victorians on their own.

I did hear yesterday talk of minimum financial requirements in this bill over and over and over from subsequent opposition speakers – I think the member for Narracan and the member for Morwell. Well, minimum financial requirements are part of the buyer protection reforms that the Liberal opposition opposed last year. They are still part of the reform package, but indeed they are not part of this bill, so I am not sure what the obsession is with MFRs. It was repeated again and again. The opposition are referring to legislation that passed this place a year ago, has already received royal assent and is enacted into law. It is worth asking if people are reading the right bill in that way too, I think.

The other argument I have seen from the opposition is about increased building costs for the industry, and this is a concerning argument – it really is. But at the same time I think some data would allay fears here. The Centre for International Economics estimates Victoria has amongst the highest rates of defective building work, with an estimated 1.04 defects per dwelling, and for apartments the rate of defects is the worst nationally at 2.13 per apartment built. Whilst the precise cost of defects is obviously difficult to quantify, the CIE also estimates that defects cost Victoria more than \$675 million annually. We saw even in our debate on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 that CSV found that 50 per cent of buildings in its program had non-cladding defects, including serious issues like water ingress, and 78 per cent of those buildings were less than 10 years old. That points to systemic problems, not isolated cases.

The BPC data tells the same story: around 60 per cent of complaints relate to defects and noncompliance, and BPC's audit work also found that every audited building had at least one area where compliance could not be demonstrated. So I think we are coming to the same conclusion here if we rely on data. We rely on a foundation of evidence, which is that Victoria needs to continually strengthen its building regulator to reinforce confidence in industry, and that is exactly what this bill does. It is not about adding burdens to the industry. It is not about adding burdens for those doing the right thing. It is about stopping poor practices and the effects of those poor practices, meaning financial strain on good Victorians, and reducing those defects before they become entrenched and costly to fix. I think that matters as much to the industry as it does to consumers, because fewer defects mean fewer disputes, fewer defects mean fewer costly rectifications and fewer defects mean greater consumer confidence to build and buy. In short, better regulation reduces defects, and a system with fewer defects is a system that Victorians can actually trust with their nest egg and the biggest investment in their lives. I think this bill goes a long way to underwriting what this government is all about, and that is fighting for Victorians and giving them confidence in our state's building industry. When consumers are confident, the building industry wins and the industry flourishes.

Like many others in this house, as I recently said, I have had very, very sad stories come through the office door about people who have been put in these unenviable and tragic positions by shonky builders, by companies that have phoenixed their operations, and this bill is about stopping that. It is about giving a regulator teeth. Families deserve to have the confidence that work will be done right the first time, so this bill gives the BPC strong new powers to protect consumers and ensure dodgy

builders face consequences. This includes powers to proactively – I think that is a really important word, ‘proactively’ – combat dodgy building practices and work with builders and plumbers to fix problems earlier. The BPC will now have tools to enforce higher civil penalties. The BPC will be able to have a broader scope to issue infringement notices and the ability to hold directors personally liable for wrongdoing. This includes changes making it harder for company directors to escape consequences by phoenixing their businesses.

I believe the member for Mornington spoke about it yesterday, and we have been on an absolute unity ticket about an address in Frankston, Culcairn Drive, where basically, through the cladding process, as BPC found, lots of defects were found – building defects – and Culcairn Drive in Frankston is one of the worst examples of that. I remember hearing about this first from some residents that came in. The cladding authority had a look and said, ‘You actually need to get a building surveyor in here.’ There was no waterproofing in some rooms. The external balustrading was falling down. There was an interior fire-monitoring alarm system put on the exterior of the building which was rusting and falling out of the wall. There was no sprinkler system fitted into a multistorey building with a car park under the residences, which is against the Building Code of Australia. Basically, what we found out was the contractor that signed off the occupancy permit for this place was actually related to the builder. We could not for the life of us figure out how this place was signed off any other way. That dodgy operator ended up phoenixing, and these people were left with about a hundred units that needed fixing, some at their own costs. That body corporate had to get together and decide that they would bill residents extra, but it meant no-one wanted to buy those places. It was stagnant. We have come to a stage now where most of that work has been done. This bill will be heralded in Frankston as something that has been a long time coming and obviously very complicated but is very, very welcome. We ought not to delay this at all. It would be futile to delay this. I support the bill.

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (11:32): In rising to speak on this bill, I was doing a little bit of research last night, and I came across one of my favourite YouTube channels, which is *Site Inspections*. If anyone has seen it, they have seen one of my favourite building inspectors on the internet go around to see some of the worst work done around Australia. He has got his vest; he has got his cameras. He also now sells a whole heap of little gadgets to help people do those tests. He is famous for his classic phrase ‘noncompliant’. He will find so many defects in these houses, and with a lot of them it is quite disturbing what happens. It is not just about the distance between where the flashing starts and the roofing material starts – it is not just little things like that; it comes down to some serious structural issues as well. So in watching probably about half an hour of that and going down a real YouTube rabbit hole, I was reflecting on why it is so important to have a Building and Plumbing Commission set up with a single bill that we can refer to when it comes to those powers of that commission to enforce the codes and make sure that people are not getting ripped off. It is because this is such a complex, complex industry.

The building, plumbing and construction industry is incredibly complex. I feel for some of those students that I encourage to go into the building industry, who now have to try and work their way through all these different standards and all these different regulations, but having one organisation set up to support builders and to support those inspectors as well to be able to do their job is so important. I think from a government point of view having this single reference to establish this commission after the work that we have done over the past 12 or 18 months to set them up through the existing legislation is so important, because it is incredibly complex.

Building a home is, as many have said, one of the single biggest investments most working Victorians will make in their lifetime. A lot of people out in Werribee, Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes, Mambourin and all the new growth areas drop a lot of money into these new places, and it is only fair to expect that what they receive at the end of that journey is safe and is fit to live in and that the people doing the work are of good character and standing. Recently I was fortunate enough to purchase my first home, after being a renter for a very long time. Having that process around purchasing the home but also the site inspection and the inspection around that, the conveyancing and all the other stuff – it was

such a complicated process. But finding the resources through the BPC website to help us navigate that process was really, really handy. This work that they are doing with the Building and Plumbing Commission is not just about helping people who are in the industry; it is about helping consumers as well.

Buying your first home is probably one of the only times you will ever go through this process. Very few people in my electorate will buy more than one house. You know, we are not like some of those in the leafy green suburbs that seem to have 12 or 15 houses on the books – we will very rarely have more than one. There may be some with two. But out in Werribee, where the Minister for Environment does not live, however – he is more than welcome to come and visit any time – we usually only have one or two houses to our names, so it is particularly important that we have legislation that is consistent and that is a one-stop shop to understand what we are doing with the Building and Plumbing Commission.

It is a common story that we see right across the western suburbs, but it disturbs me – some of those figures that the member for Frankston, who has also seen a lot of growth in parts of his electorate with new houses, raised – to hear those rates of defects from the Centre for International Economics estimates of 1.04 defects per dwelling. It is particularly disturbing that there are so many. I understand that constructing a new building is quite complicated, but it is quite disturbing that they are so high. Having something like the BPC set up so that we can work with the industry to make sure that as they build things, they are getting done properly – to use some of those principles that come from quality assurance, maybe from Japan, where they actually fix things as they go rather than finding them at the end of the process – is really important. A lot of those different practices that we see around the world we should be bringing in, leveraging knowledge that is already in our industry to make sure that we have fewer defects. As the member for Frankston also observed – and it was a particularly disturbing figure – defects cost around \$675 million per year to the Victorian economy. That is money that would be better spent with those people building the houses that are probably their first homes or what they have dreamed about having for such a long time.

The three main objectives of the bill – establish the principal act to have that integrated administration and enforcement all in one act, legally establish the Building and Plumbing Commission as the successor to the Victorian Building Authority and equip the BPC with that stronger enforcement power – are so important to make sure that we can continue to have a good regime that supports people as they go through this endeavour, because, like I said, it is probably the one and only time you will ever build a house, or your first house, for the majority of Victorians. Improving clarity, consistency and accountability across that life cycle of building and plumbing work is not just for when they get first built out the back of Wyndham Vale or places like that; it is also about those that have already been built or works that might already be happening.

One of the great things about being a parliamentarian is when this legislation comes through it also gives you pause for thought about what is happening in your own community or in your own life. I recently asked someone to come in and fix my kitchen up and do a bit of building work. In preparing to talk to this builder, I went and actually searched them on the BPC website to make sure that they were licensed to do the work, and they are indeed licensed to do the work. They are a great local business. But it is good that that support is there for people who are going to be dropping quite a lot of money into something that they want to live in, and it is a lot of money for my partner and me. We do not come from means; we were not born with silver spoons in our mouths, certainly. We have had to work very hard to get to where we are today.

We all know that the affordability and availability of housing are the most pressing issues, and I have spoken about this many times in this house. The issue of supply is one of the biggest issues when it comes to the affordability of houses, and we have seen a lot of statistics recently showing that Victoria is one of the most affordable places across Australia to be able to purchase a house – although it is still a lot of money to drop. But support services out there, particularly things like the 5 per cent first home buyer guaranteed deposit, which the Commonwealth has taken over from the state, are a particularly

important way to get more people into that. There have been other states that have sought to water down building controls, but we continue to build more homes and build them well.

I think having this bill is first and foremost about protecting consumers. No working family should be forced to take on the responsibility, cost and time to fix defective building work. You put a lot of trust into someone that you drop thousands of dollars to, and you want to make sure that that work is being done by someone of good standing but also someone who has the technical knowledge to be able to fix things as they go, acknowledging it is a complicated industry and not every site is the same and not every job is the same. Having that clear building system objective in the act, which I note is something that has been in the last few acts that we have discussed in the house around having objectives set in the legislation, sets the principles behind what we are doing in those spaces. We recently saw it in the Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026 as well, which I think is a really innovative and good way of making sure that all our organisations, departments and authorities are meeting those objectives, particularly that objective where it is about putting the consumers at the heart of the system and putting safety at the heart of the system as well. Having those strong powers is particularly important.

In the time I have left, we have seen a lot of dodgy contractors, a lot of dodgy builders, working out the back of Werribee and Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes, and I have had a lot of people come to me as well about this work. So we are giving the BPC those strong powers, including the proactive powers to combat that dodgy building practice but also to work with the industry and help support them to fix things as they go. This is not just a slap on the wrist; it is about getting out there and changing that practice across the industry. This is a really important bill, particularly for people in my growing suburb, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (11:42): I too rise to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. I have been here in this place for almost eight years, and I have seen hundreds of pieces of legislation and policy reform come before this place. I have had thousands of conversations with constituents. I have spent hundreds of hours talking about legislation and having these conversations with constituents at my dining table with my family, and I have to say – and I will talk about this later tonight with my family – that this is one of the most important bills to come before this house. The establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission is perhaps one of the most important things that this Labor government has done in the almost 12 years it has been in government. I am going to tell you why, and it is extremely personal.

I think it was last week when we had that really heavy downfall of rain, that sort of torrential rain, overnight. I think 3 am was the worst of it, because I had to get up at 3 am. We moved into a property that has been built, a townhouse. I have spent many years as a renter, and we finally built our townhouse and we moved in. Our neighbours, the other four townhouses connected to us, have had extensive defects. I am going to name the company; it was AVJennings. You might say, 'Hey, they've been around for a while.' AVJennings – I am not sure if they are still operational here in Victoria. I know they have been bought out by AVID because now the defects that my neighbours and I are having to deal with go through a new company, through AVID, who have been slightly better on the communications than AVJennings. But at 3 am we had to get up and we had to check that there were not leaks in our house, because our neighbours were experiencing water coming through. Not coming through the roof, thank God – if you have problems with the roof, it is pretty serious – but through the downstairs bedroom. We ran down to my daughter's room, and sure enough water was coming through her roof. I think it was a Thursday night, because she had an exam on Friday morning and she stayed at home. She actually missed the exam. She was very upset; she was in tears. She had to get up at 3 am and come into my bed to go to sleep, because we had to put a bucket on her bed to catch the water coming through the roof. The reason this has happened is because we had a dodgy builder, and that was AVJennings.

Thousands of people across this country have built homes with AVJennings. There is commercial real estate that has been built through AVJennings, including the property that I live in. We went with AVJennings because we thought they were reputable and would do a good job. Well, over the last

12 months we have found out they have done anything but, and I can tell you, it is a horror situation. People say to me, 'How do you deal with stress?' There is nothing stressful about this job compared to trying to deal with defects in a property where your dodgy developer and builder does not really exist anymore and you are having to deal with a company that operates out of Broadbeach, Queensland. What has happened in our property is how bad this can be, and this is why this legislation and the Building and Plumbing Commission are just so important and will make absolute change in significant ways. Unless it has happened to you, you can never fully understand.

The waterproofing on our balcony: apparently the way in which that is installed and has to be done requires licensed people to do it – people who actually know what they are doing – and you always hope that the site supervisor is supervising tradies. They have come on and they have not done the waterproofing properly, so the balcony is leaking into the downstairs bedroom, and not on just our property, but in five properties. When I went for a walk in the evening with my dog, I was stopped the other day – this was shortly after the rain – and there was a neighbour from the townhouses and the apartments behind us who said, 'I just want to reach out and say I feel your pain.' I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said, 'Well, I know you guys also have the same dodgy developer.' There are up to 19 balconies as part of this precinct that have defects – the same defect – because the same dodgy builder had the same dodgy tradie, who probably was not licensed and accredited, I do not know, waterproof these balconies. The actual cost, I heard haphazardly, to the new builder who has bought out AVJennings is coming close to a million bucks for 19 balconies. This is just one of many defects. So when I say to you that this legislation is so important, I say to colleagues on this side of the house and to those opposite: unless it has happened to you, you will never fully understand how important this legislation is. When I saw it on the list for today, I thought, 'This is amazing,' but what I really hope I do not have to do is go ahead and use it. My neighbours probably will have to. Their buildings are in a lot worse condition than mine. We love where we are. We are very happy. We have no intention of moving. But the shock and horror that you can think you have a reputable developer like AVJennings build a property, only to be told by the people that have bought it out – and they have done full site investigations – that it is one of the worst jobs they have ever seen, is absolutely appalling. The fact that these people will get away with it and have made money from it is just beyond reprehensible. It is hard to imagine.

I do want to thank the minister, and I want to thank the Premier and the government – my own government – for bringing on this legislation and for affording protections to people just trying to build a house wherever, or an apartment or a townhouse. Unfortunately, in this state the building industry does have dodgy operators within it. I am not saying they are all dodgy, but when we are in the process of trying to build 800,000 homes, what I would say is protections must be in place for the buyers and the builders.

I do truly think that the Building and Plumbing Commission is such an important and integral part of the journey of anyone trying to build their dream home. I hope it is not a journey that, like I said, I will have to delve into. I do not like to think that I will be here again talking about such an experience, or I hope it will be a positive one. The watchdog now has teeth and it needs to use them so the building industry know it is game on. You cannot have dodgy tradies coming onto sites doing defective work and not being supervised, whether they know the work is defective or not, or they are cutting costs and then walking away and the cost then lands on the home owner – or, as in our situation, the company that has bought out AVJennings. We have been dealing with these defects for the past 12 months. When you have a new build, you kind of go, 'Okay, we have got defects in the paint. This might not be screwed on.' All right, you can accept that. But when you are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars – like I said, 19 balconies at a cost of around a million bucks – I mean, that is just absolutely shoddy work, and it needs to be called out.

There is lots of reform we have been doing in this space, and I have been watching it unfold over the past eight years. Representing a community where there are thousands of new homes being built, thousands of new townhouses and apartments, particularly in Melbourne's outer west, there is nothing

more tragic than sitting down with grown men in my office in tears, with me consoling them about the dodgy defects in their properties. Having experienced it myself now, the empathy and the sympathy are from real lived experience. I too want to sit there with my head in my hands, but what I can say to my community and Victorians is that Labor has your back. If you are currently experiencing this, we are going to give you the opportunity to chase these people and get the justice you deserve, or if you are going to be building your dream home – I do not care whether it is your first, second or whatever – you will have protections, because the money that goes into building these properties is huge. It is usually a once-in-a-lifetime spend, and people do need protections.

What I would say to the building industry is that, for the good operators who are doing the right thing, the dodgy ones need to be called out. You cannot have them subcontracting on your site. These sorts of defects really do affect families. They cost a lot of money and they certainly can ruin the experience. What homebuyers and home owners are wanting is to have such a joyful experience when they move in. I am dreading the next downfall of rain. I know who is going to be asleep in the bed next to me. But this is truly a wonderful, wonderful bill before the house, and I commend the minister for bringing it through this week.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (11:52): It gives me great pleasure to rise this morning to make a contribution in favour of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, because you cannot be a government that want to build more homes unless you are a government that want to protect those consumers that are making the biggest investment, in all likelihood, that they will make at any time in their lives.

We have to protect consumers from unscrupulous behaviour within the construction industry. I have been a member of this place now for 3½ years, and like the member for Laverton and like the member for Kalkallo, the minister at the table, I represent an incredibly fast-growing area where thousands and thousands of homes are being built every single year. In the 3½ years that I have been a member, I cannot count on two hands the amount of constituents that have sat in my office and told me an absolutely nightmarish story about a construction company that has built their dream then phoenixed – you know, shut down – and how now they are left with dozens and dozens of defects all the way through their home and are trying to go through what is a horrendous process to try and get those fixed. I have had people in tears in my office that have spent their life savings to build their dream home just for it to be crumbling around their ears a couple of weeks later, with no company left to hold accountable. I concur with the member for Laverton. This is one of the more practical and important pieces of legislation that I have had the pleasure to support in this place for the 3½ years that I have been a member, because I know how much it means to the families that have been affected in this way in my electorate of Tarneit.

I note the reasoned amendment from the opposition, which in my view is diabolical. How can any opposition of good standing say that we should delay the passage of this bill whilst there are families out there, like I said, who have embarked on a dream to build their own home and had it turn into an utter nightmare? I think they cited consultation as part of their reasoned amendment, which we all know is false. It is just to delay the passage of this bill because they have some backers in the industry that do not like it, and shame on them for doing so.

As I said, we are not just a government that want to build more homes for Victorians where they want them, but we are also a government that want to protect consumers from what has been, from time to time, unscrupulous behaviour within this industry. With the house's indulgence, because it is slightly left of the scope of this piece of legislation, we all remember the case of Porter Davis only a couple of years ago, where fantastic families in our growing suburbs, and many families in my electorate of Tarneit, were left holding the bag with half-constructed homes after a large building company went into administration and indeed continued to take deposits and trade whilst insolvent. The government stepped in at that time to support those families, and this piece of legislation is another example of government intervention to protect working families and to protect Victorians from their dream becoming an utter nightmare. When homebuyers are left to fight dodgy builders on their own, or

indeed when those builders no longer exist, they can be exposed to debilitating debt and to heartbreak. Like I said, there are some examples that I have encountered in my own electorate, with my own constituents. It literally breaks your heart as a member to have those conversations and to see, at times, how helpless those families are in trying to recoup the losses that they have encountered. So it is an incredibly important piece of legislation. I think it is incredibly important and practical to have the one regulator in this space. Like I said, building more homes starts with building better quality homes, and if homebuyers are more confident in the system and in the lasting quality of a new home, especially with off-the-plan apartments, they are more likely to buy.

This is obviously pertinent timing for legislation like this, given the housing statement that we released some years ago now – I think 2½ years ago – and our plan to build more homes in places where people want them. Outer suburban Melbourne – in the south-east, in the north and in the west – has shouldered the load of housing growth for far too long. We have shouldered the load in a disproportionate way. That is why the activity centres that have been announced as part of that housing statement are so incredibly important. Making sure that 70 per cent of new homes are built near existing infrastructure, like train stations, upgraded roads and schools – that critical infrastructure that Victorian families need to make the place that they live a home – is incredibly important. I know how incredibly popular it is in places like Tarneit which, as I said, have been shouldering the load for too long.

Recently the opposition released their response to our housing statement – their own housing policy, which is more of the same. They are not opposed to some further height limits as long as they are not in their electorates, so they have gone out of the eastern suburbs and, I believe, to Fitzroy, Brunswick and Collingwood, because not many Liberal voters live there. But they have also come out and said bluntly that they plan to stick tens of thousands more homes in the outer suburbs, which are already bursting. They do so at the same time as coming in here every time there is a bill of this nature and criticising infrastructure levies. They come in here and they criticise infrastructure levies that developers have to pay to be able to build and fund the critical infrastructure that is needed in greenfield sites. At some point the opposition will have to come clean with its plan. You are going to build more houses in the outer suburbs, and you are also going to reduce infrastructure contributions from developers, and you are also going to reduce spending and debt and have a higher surplus et cetera. They are going to have to come clean with the Victorian people at some point and people in the outer suburbs that what they are planning to do is to repeat the mistakes from the past of the member for Bulleen – I have spoken about the *Tarneit North Precinct Structure Plan* in this place before – and build tens of thousands more homes in our outer suburbs without any plans for infrastructure or transport infrastructure, without any plans for health infrastructure, without any plans for play spaces or for outdoor recreational spaces and without any plans for health infrastructure, because in their housing plan there is no way to pay for it. In contrast, we will build new homes near existing infrastructure and near existing train stations so people can live the life that they deserve to live close to where they grew up if they choose, close to existing transport infrastructure and close to fantastic schools as well.

At the beginning of this contribution I said that you cannot be a government that plans to build more homes and that wants to build more homes – we are building more than any other state in Australia – if you do not want to be a government that looks after consumers, and that is exactly what this piece of legislation does. I commend it to the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** Before I call the member for Bass, I remind members that ‘you’ is a reflection on the Chair and to please refrain from using that terminology.

**Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (12:02):** I rise to speak in support of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. As we have heard, Victorians invest their savings, their time and their trust into their homes and families and everyone expects that investment to deliver safety, quality and long-term security, and this bill strengthens that expectation. It gives Victorians confidence when they build, buy or renovate. It delivers assurance that homes meet proper standards and reflect the value people pay for them. This legislation places protection of Victorian households

at its centre, and it strengthens the confidence across the housing system and supports a more reliable pathway to home ownership and improvement. The effectiveness of the building regulator directly shapes the quality of homes delivered across our state. As Victoria continues to grow, new communities emerge near transport, jobs and services, and this growth demands a regulatory system that is strong, coordinated and responsive.

In 2024 the Victorian Building Authority commissioned an independent review following concerns raised by consumers, and the findings confirmed systemic weaknesses and highlighted the need for structural reform. The government responded with decisive action. The creation of the Building and Plumbing Commission brought together the functions of the Victorian Building Authority, Domestic Building Dispute Resolution Victoria and domestic building insurance, and this integration marked a significant step towards a more cohesive regulatory system. This bill completes the final step by formally establishing the commission and embedding its authority within a new legislative framework.

The bill delivers three clear outcomes: it establishes a new principal act that consolidates administration and enforcement across the building and plumbing system, it formally establishes the Building and Plumbing Commission as the successor to the Victorian Building Authority and it equips the commission with stronger enforcement powers to uphold standards and protect consumers. These reforms create a modern foundation for regulation. They replace fragmented arrangements with a unified and coherent system. They provide clarity for industry participants and stronger safeguards for the public. This bill represents the most significant transformation of the building regulatory framework since the introduction of the act in 1993. Over three decades amendments and additions have layered complexity into the act, and the system has grown harder to navigate and more difficult to enforce. This bill introduces a clean, structured and contemporary legislative approach, and these reforms align with the government's broader agenda.

The housing statement prioritises speed, supply and efficiency. Victorians need more homes delivered faster and in the right locations. The building statement prioritises integrity, accountability and strong oversight, and Victorians expect homes that are safe, durable and built to a high standard. This bill brings these priorities together. It supports increased housing supply while strengthening system integrity, and it ensures that growth in construction aligns with quality and safety expectations. Clear legislation supports this outcome. Defined roles and responsibilities reduce confusion. Strong monitoring powers allow earlier identification of risks. Early intervention enables faster resolution of issues. These elements work together to support timely delivery of housing while maintaining high standards.

Recent events have shaped the urgency of these reforms. High-profile failures within the building industry have eroded public confidence. The widespread use of combustible cladding created serious safety risks and financial burdens. The collapse of Porter Davis Homes in 2023, like many others, has left families facing uncertainty and loss. These events exposed weaknesses in oversight, enforcement and consumer protection, and this bill addresses those weaknesses directly. It responds to priority reform areas endorsed by the housing and building committee. It advances the development of an integrated one-stop shop regulator. It strengthens enforcement powers to ensure effective action where required.

The policy underpinning this bill has undergone thorough consideration. Cabinet endorsed the model for the integrated regulator, gave approval to draft the legislation, followed ongoing consultation, refined the framework and ensured its practicality. Consultation has played a central role in shaping this bill. The department engaged extensively with industry representatives, consumer advocates and legal experts. Workshops explored regulatory powers and system objectives. Surveys gathered feedback on key proposals, and advisory groups provided ongoing input throughout 2025 and 2026. This collaborative process strengthened the final design and ensured the legislation reflects both operational realities and community expectations, and the impact on consumers stands at the forefront of this reform.

The bill introduces a clear building system objective centred on consumer safety and health. This objective guides decision-making across the entire system. Regulators, builders and all participants align their actions with this shared purpose. Stronger enforcement powers support this objective. The Building and Plumbing Commission gains a comprehensive suite of tools. These tools allow early intervention in minor matters and decisive action in serious cases. This approach reduces harm and prevents escalation. Improved information-sharing provisions enhance the commission's ability to act quickly. Access to relevant data supports timely responses and reduces risks for consumers. The continued role of the building monitor ensures ongoing attention to systemic issues. Emerging risks can be identified early and addressed effectively, and these measures create a system that is easier to navigate, more responsive and more protective.

The bill also delivers important benefits for builders. A modern legislative framework provides clarity and consistency. Builders operate with a clear understanding of obligations and expectations, and this reduces in turn uncertainty and supports compliance. Early intervention tools such as improvement notices offer practical advantages. Builders receive timely guidance on compliance gaps. They can address issues before they escalate into disciplinary action or prosecution, and this approach reduces costs and protects professional reputations. The enforcement framework reflects proportionality. Actions must match the scale and severity of wrongdoing. This ensures fairness and supports confidence in regulatory processes. Stronger oversight removes poor practices from the industry. Unregistered and noncompliant operators face greater scrutiny and consequences, and this creates a fairer competitive environment. Businesses succeed through quality, innovation and productivity. Increased trust in the regulatory system encourages investment. It supports economic activity and strengthens the building sector as a whole.

Plumbers also benefit from these reforms. The bill delivers a consistent and transparent framework for regulation. It aligns disciplinary arrangements across builders and plumbers, promoting fairness and equity. Stronger oversight supports high standards of workmanship. It removes operators who undermine the reputation of the profession and ensures that compliant plumbers compete on equal terms. Existing arrangements for licensing and registration continue under the Building Act 1993 and the Plumbing Regulations 2018. The bill strengthens the broader system while maintaining the established processes where appropriate.

The building system objective reinforces the importance of safe and effective outcomes. Compliance involves meeting standards and exercising professional judgement to achieve these outcomes. Design choices, construction methods and approval decisions reflect this focus. Building surveyors, inspectors and practitioners demonstrate how their work supports safety and public wellbeing. Existing compliance documentation already supports these expectations. The reform clarifies and reinforces them. It creates alignment across the system without introducing unnecessary burden.

The bill is about restoring confidence in the system, in the regulator and in the law itself. It recognises past failures and fixes them. It puts safety and consumers where they belong – at the centre. It supports good industry practice and removes incentives for wrongdoing. Ultimately it sends a clear message to all Victorians: when you build or buy a home in this state, the rules matter, safety comes first and accountability is real. I commend the bill to the house.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (12:12): I rise to speak in strong support of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. This is an important reform. It goes to something deeply personal for every Victorian – the place they call home. For most people, their home is not just a financial investment, it is where they raise their children, it is where they feel safe and it is where their life happens. When that goes wrong, when the building work is defective, when the plumbing fails and when corners are cut, the consequences are not just financial, they are emotional. They are deeply stressful, and too often they are life disrupting. That is why this bill matters, because at its core it is about protecting consumers and protecting families from exactly that kind of harm.

I want to start with the reality of what people experience when the system fails. In my electorate of Glen Waverley, I have had residents come to me with stories that, frankly, should not have happened in a modern, well-regulated building system. I have met families who saved for years, sometimes decades, to renovate their home. They trusted a builder, they signed a contract and they did everything right, and then the problems began – water leaking through ceilings within months of completion, bathrooms that were never properly waterproofed and pipes that were incorrectly installed, leading to mould, structural damage and thousands upon thousands of dollars in rectification costs.

I heard of an experience from Brian and Lyn, who were basically at the end of their working career. They had their big family home there in Vermont, and they wanted to downsize to a smaller property that was more manageable for them in their retirement. They paid the builder. It all got built. Then three weeks after moving in they started smelling a sewer smell that was coming up through the laundry, so they went back to the builder and asked them to rectify the issue. The builder then sent out the plumber that had done the original work, who said, ‘Oh yeah, it’s a bit wrong. I’m going to go and fix it, and I’ll change whatever the levels were.’ Well, she did not want to have that plumber back. He did not do the work properly in the first place. So it got into a battle between her and the builder about trying to get those works rectified. When she and Brian came to see me, you could see that they were not sleeping. You could see the stress on their faces. You could just see all of this pain that they were experiencing with this administrative nightmare of trying to get these things rectified. The system, as it was two years ago, did not really help them at that stage. I am hoping things like this will help to make a difference, so that when people make these big, life-altering decisions they will have an understanding that if they have got a problem it will get fixed.

Another constituent told me about a builder who simply disappeared mid-project – no answers, no accountability, just an unfinished home that left the family in limbo. These are not isolated stories. We have all got stories here. We are all telling stories here in this chamber today. They point to a simple truth where the system fails to hold bad actors to account and it is the ordinary people that pay the price. That is why one of the most important aspects of this bill is the creation of a stronger and more powerful regulator in the Building and Plumbing Commission. For too long the system has been fragmented with responsibilities spread across different bodies, gaps in enforcement and delays in resolving disputes – this bill changes that. It brings regulation, insurance and dispute resolution together under one roof. It creates a single integrated watchdog with real teeth, not just to respond after harm has occurred but to intervene early and prevent harm in the first place. That matters, because a regulator that can act early, that can issue improvement notices and that can step in before defects escalate is a regulator that actually protects people.

This bill also does something fundamental that has been missing in our system for too long: it puts consumers at the centre. For the first time it establishes a clear building systems objective to protect the health and safety of occupants and the public. That might sound simple, but it is powerful because it means that every decision, whether by the builder, a surveyor or a regulator, must be guided by that principle – not by profit, not by convenience and not by cutting corners but by safety, quality and accountability, and that is exactly where the focus should be.

I want to speak about enforcement, because this is where the rubber hits the road. We all know that the vast majority of builders and plumbers in this state do the right thing. They take pride in their work, they build homes that last generations and they deserve our respect. But we also know that there are those who do the wrong thing. The reality is that under the old system the consequences were often not strong enough. For some operators a fine was simply the cost of doing business – this bill changes that. It introduces a modern enforcement framework, including stronger investigation powers, civil penalties and the ability for courts to strip profits from those who cut corners and put people’s lives at risk. It introduces new disciplinary powers, including the ability to suspend or cancel licences quickly where there is a serious risk to consumers. Importantly, it introduces director liability, because too often we have seen phoenixing behaviour where a company walks away from its obligations leaving consumers to pick up the pieces, only for the same operators to re-emerge under a new name. This bill

says, 'No more.' If you were a director and you allowed that to happen, you will be held accountable. I will bring up the guy again: Frank Nadinic from Maxstra, who set up many, many, many companies using different dates of birth and different cities of birth. He would often just phoenix the companies, leaving many people in the lurch, especially subcontractors, and just put so much harm and pain through our community.

I want to return briefly to the human impact, because behind every clause in this bill is a person, a family, a story. It is the young couple who bought their first home only to discover major defects months later. It is the retiree who invested their life savings into building a new house, just like Brian and Lyn, only to spend their retirement fighting for repairs. It is the family living with buckets, catching water from a leaking roof, wondering how it all went so wrong. These are all real experiences and they go to the heart of why reform is needed. When somebody buys or builds a home, they should not have to become an expert in legal disputes just to get what they had paid for. They should not have to chase builders and insurance regulators just to fix those defects. They should be able to trust the system. This bill is about restoring that trust. It modernises dispute resolution processes so they are faster and easier to navigate, it strengthens insurance arrangements so consumers can access support more quickly when things go wrong, it improves information sharing so regulators can act on risks earlier and more effectively and it creates clearer roles and responsibilities across the system so everyone knows who is accountable for what.

Importantly, this bill supports the broader challenge we face as a state delivering more homes. We know we need to build more homes to meet demand, but we cannot do that at the expense of quality, because building more homes only works if people have confidence in what is being built, confidence that their homes will be safe, confidence that defects will be fixed and confidence that the system will back them if something goes wrong. This bill helps deliver that confidence, and that in turn supports investment, supports industry and supports the delivery of new housing across this state. There is a phrase I have heard from constituents more than once: 'We just wanted someone to be on our side.' That is what this bill does; it puts the system on the side of consumers. It says that when things go wrong, there will be accountability. It says that those who do the right thing will be supported and those who do the wrong thing will face consequences. And it says that the safety and wellbeing of Victorians will always come first.

I do like to have a good conversation with the member for Narracan often about building and plumbing and the industry as a whole. We have many disagreements with regard to how things are done, but we do care for the people of Victoria. We care about them being able to have a home that has been built right, built correctly and delivered how it should be. I know the member for Morwell and I have good conversations on that as well. We just want to make sure that we have good quality homes for our constituents and that when they pay for a home, they get what they have paid for.

In closing, this is a significant reform. It is a once-in-a-generation overhaul of how we regulate building and plumbing in this state. It is about fairness, it is about accountability and ultimately, it is about protecting people, protecting families and protecting the place they call home. I commend the bill to the house.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (12:22): I also rise to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. It has been interesting listening to the variety of contributions from across the chamber on what I think is actually quite an important bill – an important bill because it really gets to the heart of a functioning market. This is something I am really interested in from the perspective of policy but also as a local representative, where you see the consequences of when markets fail and when you have informational asymmetries between a builder and somebody – that very small cohort of builders who do the wrong thing, who cut corners or who engage a subbie who may not be qualified for the job. As the member for Laverton so powerfully canvassed in her contribution in the context of waterproofing, someone may know that the job has not been done well, but the person buying a new property – or buying a second-hand property that is not necessarily a new build but that continues to have defects – does not know about that. So a bill which seeks to improve

those information asymmetries, improve consumer confidence in the market and enable the market to function better I think is a good bill.

It comes off the back of the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, which we debated earlier in the week and which I also contributed to. I think it is another example of where challenging practices in the context of the construction sector have undermined confidence and undermined investment. Turning back to some of the contributions that have been made on this bill, Acting Speaker Farnham, I was particularly interested, when I was sitting in the chair, in your own contribution when you were wearing the member for Narracan hat. I respect your extensive experience as a practitioner in the building trade and your contribution to home building in West Gippsland and environs. But I do disagree with some of the points that you made in your contribution. Without reflecting on the Chair, I might seek to deal with some of those. I think they have also been made by others opposite throughout the debate – suggestions that the bill will impose an unmanageable compliance burden upon the construction sector and also financial obligations that will completely erode building activity in the state.

My perspective is somewhat different, looking at it from a systemic perspective, because when you have a complete loss of confidence – this can happen when, for example, you have got flammable cladding on the side of high-rise buildings – it is understandable in that instance that fewer people will want to transact or to purchase an off-the-plan apartment. At a time of significant population growth and with a need to build the housing that will provide homes to people in Victoria, in that context of a growing state, that confidence is really important. So I come back to that point that market failure can exist when there is not an adequate information base and confidence base for consumers when they are making what will be the most significant decisions and investments in their lives.

I also look at it from the perspective of the vast majority of builders, who are, as you made the point in your own contribution, Acting Speaker Farnham, mum-and-dad operators who are doing the right thing and who are working really hard on behalf of their clients to deliver homes which are safe and compliant and do not have the kinds of issues that the Building and Plumbing Administration Enforcement Bill is seeking to address. But it is those good operators who are most exposed in some respects by the conduct of dodgy operators, because their conduct has a chilling effect upon the whole market. It diminishes confidence, it diminishes investment appetite and it means that those who are doing the right thing, and who probably have a higher cost base as a consequence and are being undercut by those who are actively and knowingly doing the wrong thing, are the market operators who are most exposed and most damaged by that conduct. That is why, again, taking a contrary position to the contributions of those opposite, I think this is a bill which injects greater market confidence and greater certainty for those good providers.

I touched upon the member for Laverton's contribution earlier. She is not in her chair, but the member for Laverton is still in the chamber. That was a really powerful example of why the provisions in this bill are necessary, because it does wreak havoc on people's lives in a real and tangible way. I think all of us, particularly those of us perhaps in growth corridors – or like my community in Greenvale, where there is a lot of infill development, where acreage blocks have been chopped up over the last decade and a half and a much greater density of housing has been built – have constituents who have had some of the most challenging circumstances they are ever likely to confront in their lives because of two principal reasons. One, they have been left with a dodgy product that is fundamentally unsafe, unsound, and has created massive challenges for their families. As you put it as well in your contribution I think, Acting Speaker Farnham, waterproofing seems to be at the core of so many of these issues. I am not a plumber, I am not a builder, but I do have a basic appreciation of how water can enter and flow, and it will find that weakest point. That is why getting that right the first time around is so important, because the consequences that stem or that flow – an unfortunate pun – from a lack of adequate waterproofing, like mould and the destruction of internal plastering and so forth that can come from that, add huge burdens onto people, which current arrangements have to meet privately or which have been socialised back onto the taxpayer.

The other issue that has arisen in a similar vein – and the member for Tarneit mentioned this in his contribution, and I think it is germane to this debate – is the collapse of Porter Davis. Again, informational asymmetries existed between the builder, in the form of Porter Davis, and their clients on the basis that clients in good faith thought that their builder had taken out insurance on their behalf, and when they did not and when that entity collapsed, it left mums and dads in my electorate, families who were building their first home, holding the bag. We as a government intervened to correct that, but that comes at a cost, and it comes at a cost to the taxpayers who are socialising the responsibilities that should be borne and discharged by the builder in the first instance. It is why regulatory and legislative change like this bill with the Building and Plumbing Commission I think is required in instances like that – to strengthen consumer protection. There is always a tension between ensuring that consumer protection is adequate without creating unnecessary and undue compliance burdens. But we have seen such egregious examples of market failure that have imposed incredible and frankly unsustainable costs upon individual consumers. That language can be too abstract. They have imposed real financial hardship on the people we represent, the families that I have spoken to who, as the member for Laverton said, are in tears and utterly distraught because they have seen what they thought was already the biggest investment they were ever going to make in their lives either go up in smoke, proverbially, or have an extra couple of hundred thousand dollars added to it, which they do not have, to rectify, to make good or to complete the build, as in the context of Porter Davis collapsing.

As someone who is cognisant of that need to strike a balance and to avoid imposing excessive compliance burdens upon those operators in any market – builders in the context of this market – who are doing the right thing, I do come back to that basic principle that it is the job of government to ensure that punters are not left holding the bag, as it were, but also that there is a duty upon government to ensure that it is not taxpayers collectively who are left to pick up the pieces and socialise the losses of market operators who should have been doing the right thing in the first place.

I have seen that happen too often in Greenvale. I have seen it happen through the media in other parts of Victoria too. That is why it has been an interesting debate, because so many people have drawn upon individual examples from either their own community or, as the member for Laverton did, their own households where these things have not been done properly. At a time when a lot of the housing that is being built, across Melbourne in particular but I am sure down in Warragul and Drouin as well, is more townhouse-oriented developments that are new builds, a higher density form of development, or high-rise development, which is very hard to rectify, we need to get this right first. It needs to be done at that end of the pipeline so that consumers are not left holding the bag with prohibitive costs.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:32): I too rise to speak in favour of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. In doing so I would like to mention a business that operates in Narre Warren, right on the border of the member for Narre Warren North's electorate and mine. They are called IAPMO, and they are a local plumbing and building regulation company that carries out testing, inspection and certification services. They are one branch of some several hundred that operate globally that perform these really vital testing services. I know that the group is celebrating its centenary this year. To have them operating out of Narre Warren South, where we see their industry-leading plumbing and mechanical services and the way they go about doing their certification, just means that everyday products that people use, such as heaters and cookers, are safe, because they perform the test to make sure that they meet that Australian standard. It is a terrific place. They train their employees there, and then they employ those plumbers who are trained there to perform that highly skilled work.

From a Victorian government perspective, we have also been very proud to support them as they adapt to new technologies, so it was with great pride recently that the member for Narre Warren North, the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs and I were there to help officially open their new high-tech plant all the way down in our little part of the world. It was really terrific. The government assisted with funding for that project, and it just helps businesses like this to transition into a really high-tech

business, ensuring that they are ready for a renewable energy future right here in Victoria. I wanted to kick off with that because they really are a terrific business that operates in our part of the world.

But to the bill itself, the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill is about giving Victorian families the support that they need to build or renovate their own home. It will help protect Victorian families from the risk of debilitating debt and heartbreak, with the legislation giving the Building and Plumbing Commission strong new powers to protect consumers and ensure dodgy builders face consequences. Building or buying a home is the single biggest investment that most of us make in our lifetimes, and Victorians rightly expect to get what they pay for.

Earlier this week I spoke on the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026, and this bill similarly works to put consumers at the heart of the building system, because no matter whether Victorians are buying or renting they deserve to be able to do so with confidence that they will be moving into a safe, high-quality home that is free from defects. This is particularly true as we work to build more homes right across the state.

A new public interest objective will require builders to put health and safety at the centre of every build. This is the first time a common objective will apply across the entire system. Under the bill, the objective of the building system is to promote and protect the health and safety of building occupants and the public. The purpose of this objective is to define the fundamental goal that underpins all regulation and activity across Victoria's building system. The objective makes clear that protecting the health and safety of building occupants and the public is paramount whenever building and plumbing work is carried out or is regulated.

You have heard other speakers speak to having a regulator with some teeth. Well, building or buying a home is the single biggest investment most working Victorians make, so families deserve to have the confidence that it will be done right. The bill does give the Building and Plumbing Commission stronger new powers to protect consumers and to ensure those dodgy builders do face consequences. This includes powers to proactively combat those practices and work with builders and plumbers to fix problems that were made earlier. The BPC will have new tools to enforce higher civil penalties as well as a broader scope to issue infringement notices and the ability to hold directors personally liable for wrongdoing. This includes changes making it harder for company directors to escape consequences by the phoenixing of those businesses.

In terms of civil penalties, the bill introduces a new regime which will enable the BPC to seek significant financial penalties. That will be a real deterrent to the most serious noncompliance. The ability to seek civil penalties will bring the BPC into line with other modern consumer regulators, including the Essential Services Commission as well as the EPA. Civil penalties can be large enough to strip companies of the profits they make from cutting corners and disregarding the health and safety of building occupants and the public. This will ensure that fines are not simply a cost of doing business for big and profitable companies.

Victoria's program of reform is leading the nation by building more housing while ensuring consumers are protected. More homes are being built in Victoria than in any other state. While other states have sought to water down their building controls to catch up, Victoria continues to build more homes and to build them to the highest standards. The Allan Labor government is getting on with building more homes for Victorians who need them, and reforms like the ones which are proposed in this bill will make sure that we keep delivering the high-quality homes that Victorians deserve.

Let us take a look now at some of the housing policy from those in the opposition. You might recall that in 2017 the member for Brighton opposed a development in Hampton, and that was for the building of 207 new apartments. In 2018 he opposed a new public housing development delivering 300 new homes. In 2021 the member for Sandringham opposed a proposal to build 1048 apartments in Highett.

**Cindy McLeish** interjected.

**Gary MAAS:** In the middle of a housing affordability crisis, that is what we see from those opposite, and I am really glad that the member for Eildon took the bait as well.

This bill represents the most comprehensive overhaul of the system since the Building Act 1993 was introduced well over 30 years ago now. The scale of the change in the building and plumbing industries since the Building Act was introduced in 1993 is immense, and now is the time to usher in a new era with a new principal act and a transformed regulator in the Building and Plumbing Commission. On 24 October 2024 the government announced the Building and Plumbing Commission as Victoria's new building regulator, with powers to deliver more protections for consumers, and in 2025 the Minister for Housing and Building released the building statement setting out its commitment to a safer, more trusted building system for Victoria.

In conclusion, this is a good bill. The bill complements the many reforms that have been made in the building and consumer space. It complements reforms in the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 and the Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025, which really did begin the process of creating a more integrated and effective building regulator. It is a good bill, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (12:42):** I too rise to make a contribution on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. As has been outlined by speakers before me, the bill will legally establish the Building and Plumbing Commission as a successor to the Victorian Building Authority, and it will equip the Building and Plumbing Commission with the stronger enforcement powers necessary to restore confidence in Victoria's building system.

I have had the privilege of being in the chamber for the last couple of hours, first listening to contributions as the Acting Speaker and then sitting in for subsequent contributions. I must say, I was particularly moved by the member for Laverton's contribution because of how much it resonated with my own experience. The experience that she is living through at this moment is very similar to the experience that we lived through about 15 years ago. We have had the good fortune of being able to upgrade and scale up our homes on a number of occasions. We have only purchased a new home once, and this home was a townhouse. We did not buy it off the plan. It was a fairly small builder who had developed the land into three townhouses. We bought the property when the structure was up but had not been fitted out, so it was about three months to completion. We went through all the occupancy checks. We moved into the home. We thought everything was going swimmingly. Sorry, that was probably a bad pun, because a couple of months after we moved in we noticed a puddle in the kitchen downstairs, and we thought, 'That's odd, in a ground floor kitchen, to have a puddle of what looks like water.' There had been some rain, and it appeared to have been coming through the light fittings, the downlights. It was really difficult to identify the problem. We thought maybe it was just a one-off, but then it started happening more frequently. At that time we contacted the builder, who could not be contacted and would not return any calls. They were still registered as a business but had completely disappeared.

Then there was one evening – I remember it distinctly – in June, when I reckon we had about 4 inches of rain that evening. On that particular day there were significant floods, I think, particularly down in your area, Acting Speaker Farnham, in Gippsland. They had 200 or 300 mil of rain. In Melbourne we had about 4 inches of rain overnight, and the amount of water that had come into the garage was such that the whole ceiling of the garage was just sagging under the weight of water. I think it was probably my finest engineering moment. I had to actually cut open the ceiling and try and whip up some pipe that we had so that we could actually try and drain that into the garbage bin.

*Members interjecting.*

**Paul HAMER:** I know. I am not a licensed plumber, and I am not condoning any of that work, but in the case of an emergency we had to do something to actually try and get the water away. Then that set off a very long running saga to actually try and get the plumbing issue – and it was a waterproofing

issue in the end – identified and get it repaired. As I said, the builder was nowhere to be seen. We could not make contact with him. He would not return our calls. He would not return any form of correspondence. We did try and seek some money or recompense from the builders warranty insurance. However, the insurance could not be activated because the builder was still solvent, so the insurance did not apply. Fortunately, we were in the position and we had both the skills and the resources where we could take the builder to VCAT. We managed to get an order that was successful, and then we were able to eventually get some money from the builder.

Our neighbours had a very similar situation to the one that the member for Laverton outlined. The three townhouses in our block all had exactly the same problem. They were all going down their own path, but they did not have access to or knowledge of the legal avenues that were available to them, or potentially the time and knowledge that would be required for that. They just had to deal with the problem themselves in terms of totally covering the cost of the repair. As demonstrated just even in the contributions that individual members are making today, this is not a unique problem. I mean, it has happened to me, it has happened to the member for Laverton and it has happened to a number of members. It has happened to many of our constituents, particularly in relation to some new builds.

There are many good builders out there as well, but it is really important that there are the mechanisms in place so that new home owners who perhaps do not have access to finance and the legal know-how to go through VCAT are supported in their consumer protection by the state, particularly in an environment at the moment where we are encouraging more housing and we know that more housing needs to be built. Our demographics are changing in that we are having fewer people living per house, so the number of houses needs to grow more quickly, in a way, than the population as a rate of growth. We will be seeing new housing. I think when we talk about the number of new houses, we are talking about almost a doubling of the housing stock that will have to be delivered over the next 30 years. It is really critical that we have the appropriate consumer protections in place across the building sector.

Waterproofing does seem to be an issue that comes up a lot. I am sure you, Acting Speaker Farnham, would have a lot of experience in that sector with how complicated and difficult that is. It is so important for families. Again to reflect back on what the member for Laverton was saying, it has probably never been so stressful in that environment, particularly at a time when you did not know where to turn to and you did not know what the problem was and you were lying awake at night, hearing the rain come and saying, ‘What’s this going to do? What damage is it going to do? Where is it going to go?’ You would have felt really helpless and that you did not have a solution in mind. It is even worse if you are in a situation where you do not have the financial means to address the solution at the time.

I think this bill is a really important piece of legislation in terms of the aims that it is trying to achieve in adding to our consumer protections, particularly when it comes to that significant investment that is your home and is your primary asset. For that reason, I commend the bill to the house.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (12:51): I stand today to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. As was said before I had the chance to speak, this is an incredibly important bill. We have heard many stories from around the chamber about awful situations that have occurred, and that is part of the reason as to why this bill is so important. It is important for Victoria, but it is particularly important for growing communities like mine in Kororoit. It has the fastest growing local government area in Australia, the Melton local government area. The overall objective of this bill is to establish a new principal act for the integrated administration and enforcement of building legislation and the building system. It is also to legally establish the Building and Plumbing Commission, the BPC, as a successor to the VBA, the Victorian Building Authority. Thirdly, it is to equip the BPC with the stronger enforcement power necessary to reinforce confidence in Victoria’s building system.

As we have heard, this bill will implement a new principal act to provide for the administration and enforcement of laws regulating the building and plumbing industries and building and plumbing work,

but it will also deliver the government's commitment to establish a new regulator that brings together all aspects of building quality control into a single agency by establishing the Building and Plumbing Commission. As we know, Labor fights for working people who are making the biggest investment in their entire lives, and that often is building or buying a home. When homebuyers are left to fight dodgy building work on their own, they can be exposed to debilitating debt and of course heartbreak. On the rare occasions where we find that changes like these need to be made, it is good to have consistent conversation with all across the aisle, so I am glad that there has been conversation happening with both the opposition and those across the chamber.

In Kororoit people do not just talk about housing, they are literally building it. Anyone who has come out to my patch would know that originally out there were just acres and acres and acres of paddocks. The member for Melton Steve McGhie and I often reflect on the fact that it was just paddock after paddock but is not any longer. Now there are many houses. I remember when I was younger playing basketball against Melton, and it seemed to be forever away. You would drive up the highway – the highway has not changed much, but we will hopefully fix it – and you would literally just see paddocks for days and days and days. Those days are gone now. You have got a beautiful temple on one side – you have got many temples, actually, in that area – but then you have also got a lot of homes that are all being freshly built. I think on a monthly basis, as I drive around the electorate, I will often see a notice that there are another 20 or 30 brand new houses.

People in Kororoit are stretching every dollar to get into the market. They are starting families and trying to create stability for their own family in the area. For many, building their home is their biggest investment, but if something goes wrong, it can be absolutely heartbreaking. Unfortunately, it is something that I see at my electorate office far too often. Our constituents do not come to us when things are running smoothly, and I think we can all attest to that. They come to us when something has gone wrong – when a builder has let them down, when a builder has stalled or defects have emerged, or when communication has broken down. I can say very clearly that it simply is not fair. It is terrible to see hardworking people – families who have done the right thing and are trying to scrape together deposits – signing contracts in good faith and trusting that the system will deliver what they have paid for, only to be let down by a dodgy operator. That is exactly why this bill matters, because this bill is about restoring confidence and making sure that people across all of Victoria have confidence in our trades and in our builders.

Most builders do take pride in their work. We have all got mates who are tradies and very proudly so, but we as consumers want to know that when they are handing over the keys, it will stand the test of time. It only takes a small number of bad actors to cause tremendous heartache. When those bad actors are allowed to operate unchecked, they do not just hurt families, they undermine the entire industry. They undercut the good operators, and they erode the trust. That makes it hard for everybody. It is why stronger enforcement matters. It is why civil penalties matter. It is why holding company directors to account matters. It is why cracking down on phoenixing, the practice of shutting down one company and reopening another with no consequences, is so important. Importantly, this bill is not just about protecting homebuyers, it is also about protecting subcontractors and small businesses – the people who are out there every day working their guts out to build something for not only themselves but also their families. That pipeline of skilled workers will only become more important as our communities continue to grow.

Melbourne was recently voted the most livable city, and it is a city that we all want to live in. So irrespective of where your electorate is, whether it be Kororoit or Melton or Dandenong, more homes are being built, thanks to this government. It is why it is so encouraging to see the plumbers union keen to establish a new training facility in Melton, which could train up to 600 apprentices. I have been to some of these training facilities from the plumbers union, and I have got to say they are absolutely tremendous and a great way to learn on the job but also off the job. They have the right outfits needed for a training centre. These apprenticeships will create real opportunity for our community, one that will create local jobs, build skills and support the next generation of tradespeople.

With support from both the state and federal members, I urge Melton City Council to also get behind this initiative and ensure that it can be delivered locally in Melton, like the plumbers union is trying to do. I note that my good friend the member for Melton Steve McGhie has also been a huge advocate in this space, and it is something we both hope to see come to fruition.

Ultimately, this is about people in trades and businesses, people who want to do the right thing. They start small. They invest in their tools and their vehicles, staff and training, and they take risks. They back themselves and they deserve a system that backs them too. But too often they are exposed to risk from those higher up the chain who do not play by the rules. This bill is about confidence to buy, it is about confidence to build and it is about confidence to invest. That confidence does not come from deregulation or turning a blind eye; it comes from strong, fair rules that protect people and create a level playing field. That is what this bill will deliver.

On this side of the house we are very focused on working people. We are focused on families, not just in Kororoit but across all of Victoria, who are saving for their first home and who are going to take that big step with the deposit that they have saved up. We are focused on tradies starting their own businesses, we are focused on small operators trying to do the right thing and we are focused on making sure that the system works for them. But what do we see from those opposite?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** Member for Kororoit, you can continue your contribution after lunch.

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

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

**The SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge in the gallery the Ambassador of Lebanon to Australia Her Excellency Mirna Khawly and the consul general in Melbourne Rami Hamidi.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Fuel supply and prices**

**Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02):** My question is to the Premier. Is the Premier actively considering declaring a state of emergency in relation to the fuel crisis?

**Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02):** In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question directly, earlier this week as part of the national cabinet process all states and territories, along with the federal government, agreed to a four-step national plan that very clearly outlined the steps that would need to be pursued should the current fuel crisis that is being caused as a result of Donald Trump's war in Iran worsen – steps that we would take together as a nation. It also outlined, and it was understood, that states and territories, reflecting the differences within their jurisdictions, have responsibilities around their legislative arrangements. It is why this week we have put to the Parliament legislative change to ensure that we can, here in Victoria, secure the data and information we need from fuel suppliers to help inform our decision-making processes around ensuring that supply gets to where it needs to go and also work in with that federal national plan that has been agreed to. I assume the Leader of the Opposition is referring to –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very simple: is the Premier considering a state of emergency?

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier is being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was going to give the Leader of the Opposition some credit that her question may have been informed by the move of the Western Australian Premier to enact such arrangements in his state. I have been in regular communication with the Western Australian Premier. The reason why the Western Australian Premier has taken those steps is to ensure that same mechanism that I just referred to that we have deployed through the legislative change we have made this week, and the

same outcome that he needs in his state is through that mechanism. That is the reason why the Western Australian government has pursued that approach. It is not an approach –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was not about Western Australia, it was about Victoria.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was explaining why she is answering the question in this manner.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** It is for that reason that we do not need to pursue those arrangements that Western Australia have deployed. I have gone to some lengths today to step through it, not just for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal–National opposition but indeed for all Victorians to understand the steps that we need to take here in Victoria. Governments around the world are dealing with the consequences of Donald Trump’s war in Iran, and as a result leaders around the world need to be leading in a way that explains carefully in a considered, calm way to their communities the actions that need to be taken, and that is absolutely what I will continue to do, despite what those opposite may wish to choose to do.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Can the Premier provide an assurance to anxious Victorians that there will be enough fuel to get them home from the Easter holidays?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Let me be absolutely clear. The Prime minister and every state and territory leader around the nation are giving this same message to the Australian community – that there is enough fuel, there is enough supply for normal demand over this period of time ahead. For anyone to be suggesting otherwise, for anyone to be causing fear and concern about these matters –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is an important question about an important issue, not an opportunity for the Premier to sledge.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has answered the question already, but the Premier can come back to answering that question without any sledging.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will continue to do everything I can to support the Victorian community with the information and certainty they need and the support and the assistance they need as a result of the huge pressure that is being put on households. I reject any fearmongering and scaremongering approach by the leader of the Victorian Liberal Party.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Members will be removed from the chamber if this continues.

#### **Ministers statements: food relief**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): This morning I had the opportunity, along with the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, to visit SecondBite in Abbotsford, where my Labor government announced a \$2.6 million package of support for food relief agencies across the state. While were there we met with incredible volunteers who have been giving their time there for years, and they told us that they have not seen demand like they have seen in recent weeks ever before. They also said the demand is coming from people who you would not normally see come to food relief agencies. It is people in full-time work. It is families. It is workers. There is the tradie who turned up for the first time because the fuel that he needs to put in his vehicle is eating up a third of his wage, meaning he has to turn to food relief agencies just to put a meal on his table. That is because what we are seeing as a result of Donald Trump’s war in Iran is putting huge pressure on families and households around the state. They are paying for this. That is why this support that we have put in place today is immediate support going to those food relief agencies.

We know food relief is a temporary measure. We also know of other measures like the support I have given and we have signed off as part of that state and territory agreement process that we have achieved

today following our meeting earlier this morning. The two key objectives are a nationally consistent approach and further reducing the excise on fuel through the application of the state's GST processes. That is what has been achieved today, and it comes in a week where we have delivered free public transport for the month of April – temporary, targeted, immediate relief – and food relief so people can get the support they need. That is the work we will continue to do as households face real pressure.

### Fuel supply and prices

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. A survey by Ausveg found that 28 per cent of vegetable producers have halted or reduced planting due to fuel and fertiliser supply issues. Will the minister guarantee farmers will have access to fuel for the full season, from planting or sowing right through to harvest, to give them the certainty they need to plant their crops and feed Victorians?

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:11): It is a good question from the member for Lowan, and I thank her for asking it, because this is a really topical issue at the moment. We know that there is extreme pressure in the system on not just fuel but fertiliser, and I am glad to hear more people talking about it, because we want to see more action in regard to fertiliser. I am very pleased that the federal government this week set up the fertiliser supply working group, and we look forward to participating in that group to make sure that Victorians can get the fertiliser that they need when they need it. We know that at the moment there is sufficient supply in the system to get sowing underway, but there is concern about down the track and what that looks like – whether or not that fertiliser can get through the strait, whether or not there is enough urea at the ports in the Middle East to get here. So that is being monitored carefully. I have been advised that there is still sufficient time for that fertiliser to arrive so that cropping can continue. There is also some work being done, both intrastate and interstate, to see whether or not there can be supplies purchased between farmers. That is currently underway. Agriculture Victoria are working very closely to the sector to identify any pressure points and assist where they can. But, yes, it is a very important issue that we will continue to work on.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:13): A survey of livestock producers by the Red Meat Advisory Council has found 85 per cent have enough fuel for just one week. Does the minister support fuel rationing to ensure supply for Victorian farmers?

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:13): I thank the member again for her question. As I mentioned in the substantive, fuel is also a considerable issue which we have of course spoken about before. I am aware that some are concerned that modelling that they have undertaken does not provide long-term certainty, so Agriculture Victoria is working with the state controller to identify where there are localised shortages and to get supply to them. This is a considerable issue not just in Victoria, and again I welcome the work that we are undertaking with the Commonwealth to ensure that there is fuel for those who need it when they need it.

### Ministers statements: racing industry

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:14): I rise to update the house on the economic contribution that our Victorian racing industry continues to make to the state. Last week I had the opportunity to welcome to Melbourne the International Conference of Racing Analysts and Veterinarians – 300 delegates from around the world – an important conference gathering of international experts on veterinary and anti-doping science and practices and racing integrity led by Victoria's world-leading laboratory Racing Analytical Services Ltd. Race vetting is a very important matter, as the member for Greenvale would know. Certainly those opposite might benefit from some more thorough vetting processes; they might just have a few less late scratchings. Can I also thank the chair and the CEO of RASL, as it is known, Maryjane Crabtree and David Batty. It was an outstanding conference.

I was also fortunate to be at Flemington on Saturday for the thrilling conclusion to the Festival of Racing with the time-honoured Australian Cup. We saw Light Infantry Man and Pride of Jenni neck and neck up the Flemington straight – one of the all-time great Australian turf finishes, with Light Infantry Man prevailing. Unlike another big race over the weekend, the result of this one was not overturned the following morning. Not that anyone wanted a photo; nobody was smiling for the cameras. We also saw the unveiling of a new statue for trailblazing Melbourne Cup-winning jockey Michelle Payne at headquarters. I want to thank the passionate member for Narre Warren North for representing the government at that amazing event. Well done to Michelle Payne.

The May Racing Carnival kicks off next month in Warrnambool, and it is something that will attract some 30,000 people from across the country to Warrnambool, generating \$15 million in economic activity. The 'Bool carnival is in Western Victoria Region, where Mrs McArthur in the other place can attest to the occasional late scratching of a stablemate in other racing contests. Racing delivers some \$4.7 billion in economic activity and 35,000 jobs in Victoria. We will continue to support racing in this state.

### Taxation

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. This government has imposed 66 new or increased taxes. These include emergency services tax, GP payroll tax, land tax, schools tax and a death tax. Will the Premier rule out a tax increase in the upcoming budget?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:16): Of course the Leader of the Opposition neglected to mention the many taxes and charges we have cut and reduced over our period of time in government, but I appreciate that is not convenient for the Leader of the Opposition. I could perhaps refer the Leader of the Opposition to the lowest payroll tax in the country, which can be found in regional Victoria. I could refer the Leader of the Opposition to the off-the-plan stamp duty concession that we have done. Why have we done this? To build more homes. I know the Leader of the Opposition does not like talking about building more homes. Of course the other thing the Leader of the Opposition does not like talking about is those areas that she and her opposition would cut to fill their \$11.5 billion black hole.

**The SPEAKER:** I believe it is your birthday, Leader of the Nationals. On a point of order?

**Danny O'Brien:** Thank you, Speaker. I think you kicked me out on my birthday last year, so I will be careful. The Premier is debating the question and needs to come back to answering it.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Just as you can set your watch that it is your birthday every year, Leader of the National Party, you can set your watch that you will get this sort of fishing expedition from a desperate opposition right before the budget. You can always set your watch.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is defying your ruling.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** My point is this: the budget is on 4 May, and I would expect the Leader of the Opposition to run around with her scare campaign. What we will deliver on 4 May is this: we will be the only jurisdiction on the eastern seaboard to deliver an operating surplus. The rest of the budget will be on 4 May.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, if it assists the Premier, the budget is on 5 May.

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Kim Wells** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Make that an hour and a half.

**Member for Rowville withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will confess to getting that date wrong. My family is a *Star Wars* family, so 4 May is a date that is in our family's calendar. 5 May is the budget. 5 May is when we will reveal how it is only a Labor government that will continue to invest in frontline services and continue to invest in schools and hospitals and also how we will continue to support families with those very real cost-of-living pressures. And the Victorian community will also know this: that the Liberal Party are all about cuts, division and extremism.

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

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): This government has already doubled the emergency services tax on every home owner in the state. Will the Premier guarantee no increase to her tax on the family home?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): The Leader of the Opposition has identified the emergency services levy – a levy that was introduced by the Liberal–National government, just for the record. The Leader of the Opposition is keen to be factual; I will share that one with the Leader of the Opposition.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Well, you joined him in closing schools and hospitals.

**The SPEAKER:** Premier, through the Chair. It would be very disappointing to have the Premier removed from the chamber.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Sandringham is warned. The Leader of the Opposition is warned. The Leader of the House is warned. The member for Euroa will leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Euroa withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I reiterate: the budget will be on 5 May, and it will be a strong budget because it will be focused on families. It will be focused on providing meaningful relief to families. It will be focused on delivering frontline services for families. It will be focused on supporting Victorians when they are doing it tough and are facing challenges. I reject what the Leader of the Opposition has claimed will be in the budget.

#### **Ministers statements: Wyndham City Council**

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:22): This government has delivered major reforms through the Local Government Act 2020 to strengthen governance, integrity and accountability across Victoria's councils. We have introduced mandatory training for elected representatives, a uniform councillor code of conduct and stronger powers to deal with poor behaviour. Those reforms are grounded in a simple principle: every ratepayer and resident deserves a council that is focused on their community, not consumed by instability and distraction and division.

That is why I was deeply concerned by the recent revelations regarding the mayor of Wyndham City Council, who has temporarily stepped aside after it was revealed he had written a character reference for a man convicted of grooming and child sexual assault. As highlighted by the Attorney-General, the Allan Labor government is banning the use of so-called good-character references as a mitigating

factor in sentencing. I echo the Attorney's comments that someone does not have good character if they are being sentenced for rape and child grooming. The conduct revealed is appalling. It demonstrates a profound failure of judgement, and it is an affront to victim-survivors, their families and every decent Victorian.

Given the seriousness of these revelations and the broader instability in Wyndham's leadership, I have exercised my powers under the Local Government Act to appoint an independent monitor to the council. This is not a step that is taken lightly. It is a serious intervention reserved for serious circumstances, and I note the fact that Wyndham's other councillors have all supported this appointment and have also called on the mayor to resign. The people of Wyndham deserve a council that is entirely focused on them, and this appointment will help restore stability in leadership and ensure good governance at the City of Wyndham. I say this: our government will always defend the integrity of local government and stand with victim-survivors.

### Rental reform

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. Premier, over the last five years in Victoria rents have risen twice as fast as wages, but right now in Victoria, if a renter receives an excessive rent rise, under Labor's system they have to do all the work to challenge it. I have one constituent, for example, whose landlord tries to raise the rent 10 to 20 per cent every single year, and every single year she has to do all the work to challenge it. Premier, instead of putting renters through this onerous process, why not just reverse the onus and simply cap how much rents can go up by, like they did in the ACT and 16 European countries?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. I am not sure if the member for Melbourne was in the chamber on Tuesday when this question was asked, I think by the member for Brunswick to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, so as part of my answer I refer to the *Hansard* of Tuesday and the Minister for Consumer Affairs' answer.

**Ellen Sandell:** On a point of order, Speaker, it was an entirely different question. That was about a rental matter, but an entirely different rental matter.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Again I refer to the Minister for Consumer Affairs' answer. But we on this side of the house have been focused on recognising that renters need to have a fairer go when it comes to renting properties here in Victoria. You do that by building more homes and getting more homes into the market, and that is one area that we are delivering change.

Also I have here a long list of rental reforms that have been delivered by our Labor government that are supporting renters: banning of no-fault evictions; introducing the portable bond scheme, which has been a big help for renters, making sure they are not out of pocket; there is the work that we have done to ban rental bidding completely; making rental applications easier; and tougher penalties for real estate agents and sellers who break the law. I am sure the member for Melbourne would like me to continue by talking about giving regulators more power to stop excessive rent increases, enforcing minimum standards at the point of advertising, not just at the point when the tenant gets handed over the keys to the property, and banning owners and real estate agents from charging extra fees when you pay your own rent or apply for a property.

That is just a snapshot – the list is a lot longer – of how we have been working hard, recognising that there needed to be reforms to the system to give renters a fairer go. It is why we have had a Renting Taskforce, it is why we have set up Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, which has been successful in supporting renters, and it is why we will continue to support renters with that principle point of getting more homes built here in Victoria.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:28): Premier, you recently attended a party at billionaire Anthony Pratt's mansion in Kew – Anthony Pratt of course being a well-known donor to the Labor

Party and also to Donald Trump. Premier, you have been there, so how many spare bedrooms does Anthony Pratt have at his mansion that could be rented out to young people during this housing crisis instead of being used to wine and dine Labor and Liberal politicians?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! No-one could hear the question, member for Melbourne. Could you repeat the end of the question. I do remind you, member for Melbourne, that your questions must relate to government business.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Premier, as the leader of this government, you have been to Anthony Pratt's mansion, so how many spare bedrooms does he have at his mansion that could be rented out to young people during a housing crisis instead of being used to wine and dine Labor and Liberal politicians?

**The SPEAKER:** I do not uphold the question. It does not relate. I rule the question out of order.

#### **Ministers statements: data centres**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance, Minister for Government Services) (14:29): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's bold plan to target investment, create more jobs and grow Victoria's digital economy. AI is one of the most transformative technologies of our time. It has reached mass adoption in just three years, and it is offering significant opportunities for our state and our nation. Just last week I was delighted to attend the launch of Victoria University's Datacentre Academy, which is a partnership with Microsoft and is supported by funding from the Allan Labor government.

Data centres are the engine rooms driving AI and are foundational to a modern economy. Like the Premier has said, we will be relentless in our pursuit of data centres supported by our sustainable data centre action plan. With extensive input from industry as well as experts, we are leveraging our assets, our land, our energy and our talent to unlock projects in the pipeline worth up to \$25 billion in capital expenditure and creating thousands of jobs.

When people think about data centres, it is easy to dismiss them as big buildings where not much happens. It is easier to make those assumptions when you are preoccupied with court cases, bankruptcy proceedings or auditioning to be the Shadow Treasurer. But on this side of the house, we know it is about jobs, opportunities and positioning Victoria as a leading global player. With Melbourne home to the largest cluster of AI firms in Australia and with 40 data centres throughout the state, that is thousands of construction jobs and hundreds of jobs ongoing. We are building the digital economy that will underpin our state's prosperity for generations to come.

Why is this important? Well, let us suppose you have to attend another preselection conference. Your court documents will come back to you fast and reliably, and it means Claude can work even faster as your personal assistant, throwing together a candidate checklist or maybe even a special motion for the party room. While we are building the future and governing this great state, those opposite can barely manage to operate a Google search. The Liberal Party is an analog party for the digital age. The difference could not be clearer.

#### **Youth crime**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:31): My question is to the Premier. The youngest accused killer charged over the machete murders of young boys Chol and Dau has bragged that he will not get an adult sentence despite the government's laws. Premier, why do youth offenders believe there are no consequences for violent crime in this state?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Werribee is warned.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): The murder of the two young boys in Cobblebank is a tragedy that lives with those families forever. That is why the people who have been charged thanks to the hard work of Victoria Police are going through a court system. They are going through a system where they will be going through a process because we have introduced adult time for violent crime. The advice from the Attorney-General is that this will be dealt with through the Supreme Court.

References to these tragic murders bring only pain and suffering to the families of the two young boys who lost their lives. It is through listening to the experiences of victims of crime like that that we have introduced adult time for violent crime. There are consequences for this violent behaviour, where being tried before the adult court means jail is more likely and sentences are longer. It is why, too, working on the advice of Victoria Police, we changed the law to give Victoria Police stronger stop-and-search powers to get dangerous, deadly weapons off the streets, coupled with acting on the advice of Victoria Police to bring about Australia's first ban on machetes. Those efforts have seen tens of thousands of dangerous weapons being removed from our streets. There is more to be done, and we will continue to do it because families like those of those young boys deserve our focus, attention and changing the law to keep the community safe.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:33): Yesterday the Premier gloated that her \$13 million machete bin program was a success, yet less than two weeks ago three girls aged 13, 15 and 16 were arrested after a machete brawl outside a supermarket in Hamilton. Premier, why does machete crime continue to run rampant in this state?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): We have banned machetes in this state. We were the first state in the nation to do so, and it was on the advice of Victoria Police that we got tens of thousands of these dangerous weapons off the streets. But let us be clear: there is more to do, which is why we have toughened bail and why we have introduced adult time for violent crime. It is also why you can, under our laws, go to jail for owning a machete. I want to thank Victoria Police for the work that they are doing, and I want to acknowledge the victims of crime, who have suffered too many crimes. That is why too we have the violence reduction unit that is working to change this behaviour – this new pattern of behaviour – to prevent crime, working with young people in communities, in families and in schools to prevent crime before it happens.

#### **Ministers statements: government achievements**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:35): It is sometimes said that the Parliament is like a classroom. You have the principal up the front holding everyone to account, making sure we are educated and laying down the law when it needs to be done. You have the high achievers as well, who are excelling wherever they go. But we also know you do have some that need just that little bit more support. We all know the type: use a mobile phone when they should not, tape one another in class, poor attention to detail. We all know it is always going to end in tears.

It is the last day of term, and I think we should do a report card because it is a great opportunity to compare. When it comes to mathematics, you only have to look at this side to see 100 new schools, more hospitals and more cost-of-living support, but we also know we will continue to work hard because there is always room for improvement. On the other side, you have got to give credit where it is due. They are practising their maths. They are doing the numbers, but it is just on each other. When you are doing the numbers, you have got to be able to explain your budget black hole of \$11 billion.

How are these numbers: 65 million meals served under the Allan Labor government; \$1.9 billion invested in disability inclusion; 100 new schools opened – 19 this year; \$1 billion invested in making sure every school has a mental health and wellbeing practitioner; 500,000 school uniforms delivered to our most needy students; and 2300 upgrades to schools all across Victoria. The only lesson they need on the other side is a Respectful Relationships remedial class.

*Constituency questions*

**Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:38): (1608) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. Last weekend Warrandyte celebrated and came together for another highly successful Warrandyte Festival. I was thrilled to see Linda Stammers, Michelle Evans and Katja Gutwein from Mange Management crowned as monarchs alongside Leeanne and Ken Keam from Riverflow recycling and Bernadette Walsh from Warrandyte Repair Cafe. But there is a problem: Mange Management volunteers are filling a gap this government refuses to address. They are treating mange, an entirely preventable fatal disease, across Victoria with passion and persistence, but they are doing it on a shoestring. My question is: what is the current annual funding provided specifically for mange management treatments in Warrandyte and Victoria? My constituents want to know why it falls so drastically short of what is actually needed to protect and defend the lives of wombats.

**Cranbourne electorate**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (14:39): (1609) My constituency question is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and my question is: when will the next round of the volunteer emergency services equipment program open? The VESEP is a very popular program for our volunteer emergency services, and last year the Allan Labor government doubled the amount of funding on offer, investing an additional \$62 million in funding to these grants. That means more funding for equipment, vehicles and facility updates. I would like to take the opportunity, while speaking about our emergency services, to thank Mitchell Newman, Zoe Russell, Steven Howard, Jarryd Simmons, David Terry and Debra Jackson and all the crew at the Cranbourne CFA for all of the work that they have done over this season and generally for their extraordinary commitment to our community.

**Gippsland East electorate**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:40): (1610) My constituency question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services, and the information I seek on behalf of my constituents is: when will work commence on the Mallacoota ambulance station? A planning permit for the new station was submitted by Ambulance Victoria to the shire council in August 2023. Foursight Architects produced quite extensive planning. It was then challenged in VCAT, so the permit was delayed. It got the all-clear from VCAT in July 2025, but it will expire if the station is not commenced within the right timeframe. Surely the funds were allocated at that time. We have seen nothing in the last nine months, and the community are quite concerned that the funds may have been reallocated. So I am asking: when will the work on the Mallacoota ambulance station actually commence?

**Greenvale electorate**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (14:41): (1611) My question is for the Minister for Environment. In December last year I was so pleased to reopen the Greenvale Reservoir Park for the benefit of my community. The \$3 million investment that I secured to make this possible delivered much-needed upgrades to the southern part of the park after a decade of closure, including new seating areas, toilets, barbecue areas with charcoal barbecue sand pits, walking trails, bike paths and drinking fountains. The park formerly had a much-loved children's playground, which fire damage compelled to be, sadly, removed, but I am very pleased to confirm that I have secured further investment to deliver new play equipment. I have spoken with many local families who are very keen to find out the timeframe for the delivery of the new playground, so that Greenvale's many young families can enjoy it and forge new memories. Minister, what are the timeframes for the construction and opening of this wonderful new playground?

**Mornington electorate**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (14:42): (1612) My constituency question is for the Premier. What information can the Premier give on her government's support for Mornington electorate locals

struggling with high fuel prices? The Liberals and Nationals demanded that the Premier call on the Prime Minister to offer fuel excise relief. While this has now been done, the Premier was silent. The Premier's offer of free public transport is insufficient for us, because 82 per cent of the peninsula has no public transport and 1 per cent take public transport to work. We rely on cars. Tourists may go elsewhere these holidays using peninsula taxpayer funded free public transport instead of driving to the peninsula. This government must work with the federal government to back independent fuel operators like Endeavour Group, which is a local business, and support more local oil production and refinery capacity like Geelong's, which supplies more than half of Victoria's fuel. They must increase minimum storage levels and also keep product and profit here.

#### **Ripon electorate**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (14:43): (1613) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Minister, what are the next steps to restart construction on the Western Highway duplication between Buangor and Ararat? Every time I walk down the street or knock on a door in Ararat, this project is the first thing that people raise with me. The stretch of road has claimed too many lives, and there is a real sense of urgency to add more lanes and make the highway safer for motorists. We heard great news last month that the cultural heritage management plan has now been approved and the project's design has been updated. Locals now want to know when works will begin again and what steps are needed to make this a reality. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with them.

#### **Narracan electorate**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (14:43): (1614) My constituency question is to the Minister for Agriculture, and it comes from my farming community, who are deeply concerned about fertiliser security. The question is: what action have you taken to secure urea and fertiliser supplies to ensure we have adequate fertiliser for farmers to continue to produce? Andy Balfour from Willow Grove is just one farmer who has reached out to me, and he is deeply concerned that he will not be able to get fertiliser in the upcoming season. But he is not the only one in my area. Obviously I have a large farming community, and they are very, very concerned. I suppose Sallie Jones from Gippsland Jersey said it best at Farm World when she stated that people may not realise it now, but in six months time when there is no food in the supermarkets, that is when the reality is going to hit. I ask the minister to follow that through, please.

#### **Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:44): (1615) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety and Minister for Victims. How is the Victorian Labor government working to make the suburbs of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West safer? Further to my adjournment last night, I was pleased to host a community safety round table with the Premier recently in North Coburg on 11 February, where we heard from a range of locals that have been impacted by crime. Local dad of three Andy described his family's sense of safety in Coburg and opportunities around prevention. Ahmed Hassan talked about the work of Youth Activating Youth to prevent crime. Marwan El-Houli outlined the benefits of the future \$22 million Bachar Houli Foundation in central Coburg for young people. The magnificent Tina Papa from Shirley Robertson Children's Centre spoke on local antisocial behaviour and road safety impacts on local families. I thank all the locals who took the time to participate and thank the Premier for attending and listening to the views, concerns and productive suggestions, which we will continue to consider through the violence reduction unit. It is also why I commend Victoria Police Merri-bek area inspector Tim Jacobs, who is convening a local neighbourhood policing forum to talk about young people, family violence, road policing and drugs. It is happening on 23 April at the Coburg town hall from 6 pm to 9 pm. I encourage all residents to come along and have a say.

**Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:45): (1616) My question today is to the Premier and comes from Taryn Hunt, managing director at McGlynn Hunt Funerals. The question is: will the Labor government recognise funeral services as an essential service within the legislative and emergency planning frameworks in Victoria? As we might recall, one of the very necessary services that was not deemed an essential service during COVID was funeral services. At present, funeral services are not consistently recognised as an essential service within legislative or emergency planning frameworks right across Australia. Funeral services are a critical and time-sensitive part of the broader health and community care system and are closely linked to hospitals, aged care facilities, coronial services and community infrastructure. These services cannot be delayed or deferred. The operations rely heavily on transport, particularly diesel-powered vehicles, to attend places of death and transfer the deceased into care, and they often involve significant travel distances, particularly in our region. There is a growing concern within the industry about tightening fuel supply and the possibility of fuel rationing.

**Laverton electorate**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:46): (1617) My constituency question is to the Minister for Local Government. Over recent days I have had so many locals in my electorate write to me about the mayor of Wyndham City Council, who wrote a good character reference for a man convicted of grooming and sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl. My daughter is 15 years old, and as a mum I am absolutely appalled and sickened, as are the Wyndham community. Many community members have written to me to express their disbelief and their anger that not only does this person remain mayor but indeed a councillor at Wyndham City Council. There have been persistent issues at Wyndham for some time now, with the previous mayor facing suspension due to his conduct too. So my question is this: how will the appointment of a monitor at Wyndham City Council help to restore integrity, stability and proper governance in Wyndham?

**Bills****Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:47): I move:

That debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.****Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.*****Business of the house*****Standing orders**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:48): I move:

That standing order 62 be amended to omit the words ‘A statement of compatibility tabled under s 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*’ in paragraph (2) and insert ‘A statement of compatibility tabled under any Act of Parliament’ with the change to come into effect from 30 April 2026.

The motion supports members of Parliament to fulfil an obligation established when Parliament passed the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025 that any member introducing a bill must prepare a statement of treaty compatibility in respect of that bill and that the statement must be laid before the house before the second-reading speech.

Tabling a statement of treaty compatibility is an important step forward. It enables members to assess how proposed laws may impact First Peoples before they are passed through this place. The statement will outline any consultation undertaken with the assembly of Gellung Warl and assess whether the bill is compatible with relevant objects, similar to the charter assessments that we are all familiar with. This requirement responds to the reality that First Peoples have historically not been adequately consulted or heard on issues that directly affect them. We heard this clearly through the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and we acknowledged this history in our apology last year.

Treaty is about ensuring that history is not repeated. Statements of treaty compatibility give Parliament the opportunity to understand how proposed laws may impact First Peoples and how consultation has informed those laws. Importantly, a statement of treaty compatibility does not remove anyone's rights. It supports Parliament to make better-informed decisions in the interests of all Victorians, including First Peoples. It does not give First Peoples greater influence over lawmaking. This is a procedural requirement on the relevant member of Parliament. It does not require that the views of the assembly of Gellung Warl are implemented, nor does it require that legislation aligns with any criteria in relation to First Peoples' rights. What it requires is for the relevant member to explain whether and how a bill is consistent or not with the assembly of Gellung Warl's views and whether and how the bill is compatible or not with advancing First Peoples' rights and addressing disadvantage experienced by First Peoples. This is similar to the existing requirements for statements of compatibility under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, ensuring First Peoples' rights are considered alongside the human rights of all Victorians. It builds on existing consultation processes and does not diminish the ability of other communities to be heard.

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

Making a statement of compatibility before second reading proposed legislation in this place is an important step in making better informed decisions for improved outcomes for our First Peoples, and it is important that this motion is dealt with now to come into effect on 30 April in order for it to be in practice on 1 May when the current First Peoples' Assembly transitions into Gellung Warl in accordance with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, which passed this Parliament last year, particularly given the requirement that standing orders must comply with existing legislation. I commend the motion.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:52): I rise to speak on behalf of the coalition on this change to standing orders. I am perhaps even more confused now from the minister's speech than I was before.

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Well, it is not hard after listening to this minister maybe, member for Glen Waverley. But the Nationals and Liberals will not be supporting this motion, and that will be of no surprise to anyone, because we have been very clear in our position that we are opposed to treaty and that we will repeal treaty if we are elected later this year. Indeed this is exactly one of the reasons that we have opposed this whole process, because this change we do not think is consistent with the democratic norms or processes of the Westminster system.

I take up some of the matters that the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples at the table raised. She said it does not remove anyone's rights, but it does give a particular group of Victorians special privileges. That was my take on it. Then the minister said that it does not give them any special privileges. So what is the point of it then? If it does not provide any special privileges to Gellung Warl, what is the purpose of it?

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** It is the legislation, Minister, that I am disagreeing with. This is the process that comes after the legislation, the Statewide Treaty Bill 2025, which was passed last year, which we opposed. We are simply being consistent in our position in now opposing this change to the standing orders. The change to the standing orders will require every bill brought forward for consideration by Parliament to contain a statement of treaty compatibility. That is special treatment for one group of Victorians, just like the treaty is.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Well, the member for Mordialloc should be –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Mordialloc will cease interjecting, and the Leader of the Nationals will make his address through the Chair.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** What is being proposed here is not some minor procedural adjustment. It is a fundamental shift in how legislation is scrutinised and developed in this Parliament. The minister said that the statement of treaty compatibility for every bill is similar to the charter of human rights. It is actually not similar; it is exactly the same. The proposal elevates treaty principles to the same operational footing as the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Whatever you may think of that charter and the statements that go with legislation, it applies to every single Victorian. This does not. This gives a single group of Victorians the special privilege of being consulted on legislation even before the Parliament has seen it, even before the elected members of Parliament have seen it. I wonder how that will actually work in practice. The charter requires every bill to be assessed against a defined set of rights, invites legal interpretation and increasingly shapes how legislation is drafted, debated and in some cases challenged. This motion would replicate that model. In practical terms, treaty becomes the standing lens through which all legislation must pass, regardless of its intent or subject matter.

I reflect on some of the comments that I made on the legislation last year with the Statewide Treaty Bill, and the issue is in relation to matters that relate to Aboriginal people. The legislation that was passed uses the phrase 'matters that affect First Peoples', but nowhere in that legislation is there a definition of 'matters that affect First Peoples'. It is as broad as it possibly could be, and this change to the standing orders now is reflecting that, because every single piece of legislation will have to be considered by Gellung Warl, by the First Peoples in what is now the First Peoples' Assembly, and their feedback considered.

I ask the government: with some of the legislation we have had in the last week or two – this week the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 – what particular influence or aspect of that legislation would directly impact on First Nations people? Likewise, we had recently the dairy food safety and PrimeSafe bill that came through. There is nothing in that that I could see that would specifically affect First Nations people. Yet every single piece of legislation they will get to have their say on before even the people's representatives here in this Parliament have that opportunity. How is that democratic? How is that fair? How is that part of the Westminster system? That is not fair to the rest of Victorians. It is a real concern, and our concern about this motion, as is our concern with treaty more broadly, is that it embeds a broad and still evolving framework across all legislation without clear limits.

I note that the statement from the legislation highlights that the statement of treaty compatibility must address whether the First Peoples' Assembly was consulted; the nature, timing and content of any advice provided; and an assessment of whether the bill is compatible with treaty principles as defined in the legislation. I said at the outset that I am more confused now after the minister's commentary, because one of the questions is: what happens if the assessment finds that the bill is not compatible with the treaty principles as defined in the legislation? What will happen? Well, maybe, Minister, the Attorney-General can answer this question when other members get up and speak, because if it is not compatible and if Gellung Warl says to the government, 'No, this legislation is not compatible with the principles of treaty,' is the government just going to ignore it? Then, therefore, what is the point?

**Sonya Kilkenny** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** No, it is not mischief, Attorney-General. These are questions that you and your government have failed to answer. Another simple one is why today? Why is this change coming today when the Statewide Treaty Bill received royal assent on 13 November and effectively came into being, if I am not mistaken, on 12 December last year. Why is it that we have waited until the last sitting day of the session to actually bring subsequent changes to the standing orders into Parliament? I do not understand. This is the concern that the opposition has with this legislation: that those questions are not answered. Tell me specifically what happens if Gellung Warl is not happy with legislation? Is it the case that in fact if they raise a concern with legislation, then governments are going to have to change it and everything that comes to the Parliament will be compatible with the views of Gellung Warl. Is that the case? Again, we do not know the answer to that because that has not been made clear by the government of the day. I am hearing silence from those opposite, so I wonder whether they even know what the answers to those questions are. This creates all sorts of uncertainty for departments, for stakeholders, for the Parliament itself and for the members of Parliament themselves. It risks shifting the balance of legislative scrutiny, and that is a point I have made a couple of times already.

Under this proposal Gellung Warl, the representatives of the First Nations people here in Victoria, will have privileged access to legislation before the Parliament does. We understand the executive has that. That is our system of government. The government designs legislation and then presents it to the Parliament for development. But I have always been strongly against the principle that the treaty was a third chamber of Parliament. I have never suggested that Gellung Warl created that. However, effectively, this does give that special privilege to a particular group to know what is in legislation before it comes. We are not talking, as I understand it – and again, I am happy to have someone explain it – about an exposure draft of a bill or a consultation process that every government goes through at any given time. We are talking about the legislation as it is presented to the Parliament.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Maybe the member for Mordialloc could answer these questions when he gets up, because he has a lot to say at the moment, a lot of chatter, but not any clear substance to the questions that I am raising.

This change brings in a structural requirement across the entire legislative framework without first demonstrating how it will operate in practice. These are the questions I am asking: what are the thresholds and, most particularly, and I repeat, how will conflicts or inconsistencies be resolved? What happens if a piece of legislation is not compatible with the treaty principles?

We do not support creating overarching frameworks that apply universally across all legislation and alter the way that this Parliament operates without clear safeguards. This is a very clear concern. As I said from the outset, this change today is one of the very reasons that the Liberals and Nationals oppose the Statewide Treaty legislation. As I said in that discussion last year, even if I personally was in favour of treaty, I could never have supported the legislation that actually enacted it for the reasons that I am outlining today and particularly this situation, where there is a special arrangement. Our position has been consistent: we do not believe that the treaty will deliver the outcomes for First Nations Victorians that it is seeking.

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Have we asked them? Yes, repeatedly. I reckon I have probably met with the First Nations more often than you have.

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Now it is through the Chair. These guys are unbelievable. We have seen the government be unclear on all this stuff from the very beginning. We on this side support equal

treatment, equality of opportunity and justice for all Victorians irrespective of their race, ethnic background, how long they have been in Australia or any other characteristic. We support ensuring that everyone has the equality of opportunity to live a full, healthy, productive and happy life. That is something we believe we can achieve for Aboriginal people, and we do not think that you need to set up a totally separate process for them to do so. More particularly, we do not think that it is fair on every other Victorian that Aboriginal people have special and privileged access to the workings of government. That is exactly what it is.

We know and we understand that on so many of the Closing the Gap targets we are failing. I know what members opposite will say. They will go, 'That's why we need treaty.' But no-one has ever demonstrated any prospect that this will change under treaty. Indeed we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on treaty. So much of it has already been spent. And have we improved any of the targets on closing the gap so far? No, we have not. This is the concern that we have. This is the concern, that people have a say now. If the members opposite are saying that Aboriginal people do not have a say now, that is a reflection on the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. That is a reflection on the Premier. It is a reflection on their government. If they do not believe that, then they should explain why they have failed to close the gap on so many of those Closing the Gap targets over 12 years. For over 12 years this government has been failing. If they are not listening to the government now, then that is on you guys.

I think personally, and for all of us on this side, the norms of the Westminster system are very important. We have seen them frankly breached by this government time and time again, because the norms would say that if you fail in your portfolio then you should resign, and we have seen multiple times ministers failing in their portfolios and choosing not to. So we know that those opposite are not particularly fond of the Westminster system. They would rather just act like the opposition and the Parliament do not exist. Ministers who are members of the Parliament – who are part of the executive – must be accountable to the Parliament, and by being accountable to the Parliament they are accountable to the people.

What I am concerned about with this whole treaty process and these changes that we are doing today is that the governance arrangements around it are outside the norms of that Westminster system. I do not think anyone could ever suggest that the Westminster system has not served us well as a country and as a state. It has delivered good government more broadly – with some recent exceptions, I might say, although that is more to do with the government of the day than the system. Effectively, as I said, Gellung Warl and First Nations people are granted a level of unprecedented autonomy and access to the executive that no other Victorian gets. That is the concern that we have and why we will be opposing this piece of legislation.

I am equally concerned, on a parallel basis, that the issues that we are talking about here in this particular process are reflected in other parts of the Statewide Treaty Bill, which was passed by this Parliament. The power to make representations to inform Parliament on legislation is, relatively speaking, what we are talking about here: advising government departments and service providers, and questioning ministers and secretaries during engagement hearings. I say that no-one else gets to do that, other than members of Parliament – question ministers and departmental secretaries. I might say, as I did last year, that I wish Gellung Warl well in questioning ministers, because having been in here for 12 years and on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) for 12 years, we get no answers when it is a public situation from this government. I would hope that when behind closed doors maybe Gellung Warl might have more success than we do. Similarly, the First Peoples' Assembly is mandated under the act in clauses 86 and 87 to meet with departmental secretaries and the Chief Commissioner of Police. Those agencies, their departments and Victoria Police must develop consultation guidelines, which must be considered by government authorities and state-funded service providers. Again, this is something that is not mandated for any other group in society, only for the First Nations. I highlight that as a concern that we have, particularly about this particular amendment to the standing orders today.

I also raise, as I said before: why is this happening today? Why was it not done after the legislation passed? Why was it not done in the first week of Parliament this year? Is the government trying to bury it now? At a time when Victorians are struggling with the biggest cost-of-living crisis we have had certainly since COVID, and probably in many of our times, the government is talking about this change to give this special privilege to the First Nations people. It is curious in the extreme, and I am not sure that most Victorians would be particularly welcoming of what has actually happened here today. That is another reason why we will be opposing this.

I should have mentioned earlier too that the opposition is not operating in a vacuum on this. We announced at the time of the Statewide Treaty Bill our alternative solution, and members opposite talked about listening. Well, we have listened. We have listened to all those people throughout regional Victoria. The Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Melina Bath in the other place has undertaken extensive tours around regional Victoria in particular and has met with multiple people and multiple different groups. The biggest thing that she found was the need for services to be delivered on the ground and for power to be devolved to those services out on the ground and not to be concentrated here in Spring Street. That is why we have committed to establishing First Nations Victoria, to improve the lives of Indigenous Victorians and actually set some serious KPIs on meeting those Closing the Gap targets. The standalone department will add transparency and accountability and deliver measurable progress as we work to achieve those Closing the Gap targets. The department will work alongside Indigenous Victorians to implement a community-led, coordinated and transparent approach to policy, funding and service delivery. One minister will be responsible for delivering for First Nations Victoria, providing true accountability.

Again, in my time on PAEC, the number of times that we asked questions to, for example, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs about a particular thing, maybe education – ‘Oh, well, that’s a matter for the education minister.’ We asked about housing – ‘That’s a matter for the housing minister.’ Then we would ask the housing minister about Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal housing, and what would happen then? ‘Oh, that’s a matter for the Aboriginal affairs minister.’ There is constant passing of the buck. Our approach will have one minister in charge and a separate dedicated department that will actually be responsible for and deliver on those First Nations Closing the Gap targets. Under the Allan Labor government, the services Indigenous Victorians rely upon are fragmented across multiple departments, leading to duplication, blurred responsibilities and inconsistent service delivery, and we have seen that. First Nations Victoria is at the core of a community-led strategy to deliver to improve the lives of Indigenous Victorians. It is designed to deliver measurable progress on those Closing the Gap targets, backed up by total accountability – one department, one minister. That is what our approach will be – to work with First Nations people, particularly those outside the metropolitan area, where they are struggling for the services that they need. A member for Eastern Victoria in the other place Melina Bath will tell you what those services are, because she has been there, sat with the Aboriginal people and listened to them about what their needs are.

This statement of treaty compatibility that we are debating now does not do anything to improve the lives of Aboriginal Victorians. We actually heard in the very, very brief comments from the minister at the start that this is really important but also does not mean anything. Which is it? I ask the government to answer those key questions that I asked at the outset – fair questions about what this does achieve. What happens if the statement highlights that the treaty principles have not been met? Those are the key questions that this government has to answer. The Nationals and Liberals do not support treaty – we oppose it. We will repeal it if we are elected. We oppose this motion, and we will not be supporting it as it goes through today.

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (15:13): I will start by saying just how disgusted – not surprised, but disgusted – I am by what we have just heard from those opposite and how disrespectful to First Nations people that was. There are a whole range of things that have just been said. But we have been on a 10-year journey with First Nations people to establish treaty, and we have achieved that. It has not been a flash in the pan: ‘Let’s make treaty up’. This has been happening over a very long period of time,

listening to First Nations people and what they are telling us their communities need as the First People of this state. That is what is important here. For those opposite to say that they are going to introduce something in their own way – which is basically maintaining the status quo – is not going to do anything except maintain the status quo. In those 10 years we have listened to First Peoples and listened to what the issues are. They want to be able to play a significant part in how they deliver services to their own community, because we know the status quo does not work. For over 200 years they have been controlled – since colonisation. They have had their land stolen. They have had their children stolen. You name it, it has happened, and here we are. When we came into government in 2014, one of the first things we started to do was talk to First Peoples about how we work together to ensure that we are closing the gap. For those on the other side to complain that the gap is not closing, that is exactly right. That is why we have had this 10-year journey to come up with a treaty process that does close the gap, and that is what the expectation is of Gellung Warl, that they will work towards that. That 10-year journey has been really important.

In terms of the statement of treaty compatibility, the legislation is already there. It is in the legislation; there is no doubt of that. So it is about meeting our obligations as a government and as a Parliament that we have said in that act. It is really important that we respect First Peoples and the treaty process that we committed to as a government. I know that those opposite have opposed it – they were in favour of it initially and then changed their mind for whatever reason. To me, it sounds like they are chasing that One Nation vote maybe. The reason why they are not supporting treaty is because they are after One Nation votes. They want to axe treaty, take the money from First Peoples, go back to the status quo, so nothing is going to change. I think it is a disgrace that they will continue to oppose treaty. They will continue to be disrespectful to First People, who have actually told us what needs to happen to close the gap. We know what that is. That is why we have treaty. We have heard that over a very long period of time, and this statement sets out the details of the consultation so that there is a consultation with First People on bills that are presented before this chamber. That is to ensure that we are doing what we said we were going to do, that we are continuing to work with Gellung Warl to make sure that we are putting legislation on the table that is not disenfranchising or disadvantaging First People in this state. We have made that commitment to First People and we have to continue with that, and this statement of treaty compatibility is part of that process.

Historically, we have not consulted them, and many times in this chamber I have talked about the massacres, the stealing of children, the stealing of land – all of those things that the Yoorrook Justice Commission have very well put out in their report. These are the things that need to change, we know that, and this is why treaty has progressed to where it has. Our community support it. I have no doubt that the vast majority of people in the Victorian community actually support this process. They support what we have done.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Chris COUZENS:** The referendum had absolutely nothing to do with this treaty. Historically, we have not listened to First People, and that is why the gap is not closing. This is a way to achieve that, and we know that. First Peoples have told us that time and time again, particularly over the last 10 years, when we have worked alongside First Peoples of this state. Gellung Warl is the assembly that will work on this to ensure that government is held accountable, no matter what government is in this place. It is important that we continue down this path, that we respond to what is actually the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 right now, which is what the statement of treaty compatibility is all about. So I really commend this motion and hope that those opposite can see the importance of making sure we deliver on the treaty act.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (15:20): I very much support this motion and these changes that have come before us. I was not necessarily going to speak on this, and I will only take a minute, but listening to the words that came out of the member for Gippsland South's mouth, I had to. I felt very much compelled to get up and say something. I have had a lot of respect for the member for Gippsland South over my time in this place; we have worked very closely together. But what I just heard come

out of his mouth I have to call for what it is: it was misinformation, it was garbage, it was dog whistling and it was disgusting.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker: standing order 119.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** I would ask the member for Melbourne to come back to the substantive motion.

**Ellen SANDELL:** To suggest that First Nations people get some kind of privilege over others in this state to me says that the opposition and the member for Gippsland South did not listen to any of the speeches that we had when we did the apology to First Nations people just at the end of last year. It was not that long ago. It suggests to me that he and the opposition have not read the history of this state, because it has been so clear through the Yoorrook Justice Commission and through the speeches that were made in this place and through the stories that First Nations people have been telling us for a long time now. They have told us about their experience of colonisation and the harm that caused. Yoorrook had a four-year commission into the harm that it caused, and so much of that was about decisions that were actively made in this Parliament that caused that harm, that were made by governments in this place that caused that harm. After everything that has been done to First Nations Victorians over the last 200 years and the impacts of colonisation – that deep injustice, that deep unfairness – for the member for Gippsland South to get up and say somehow Aboriginal people are going to get some privilege in this state is just misinformation, pure and simple. For the Liberals and Nationals to try and create a culture war over the rights of First People I think is absolutely shameful. I think it is stoking racism and prejudice –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a procedural motion on a change to the standing orders. Sledging the opposition on relevance has nothing to do with that motion.

**Colin Brooks:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Brighton might not like the arguments being put forward, but the argument is relating to previous debate that has been raised by the member for Gippsland South. The member for Melbourne is entitled to refute and to argue with the points that have been made in previous debate.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham):** I will just remind the member for Melbourne, please, not to make personal references to people. But you can continue on the substantive motion.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I think in particular for politicians who hold leadership roles in their community, for anyone of that standing, to stoke racism and prejudice simply for personal political gain is disgusting, and I think we have a responsibility to speak out against it.

This change that is being put forward to the house today is simple. It is straightforward, it is sensible, it is a procedural change simply to acquit our obligations under treaty. Treaty already passed this Parliament, so all we are doing here is acquitting obligations of a piece of legislation that we already passed through this Parliament. It is a simple change. We should simply get on with it and do it. All it does is ask legislators to consider the views of our First Nations community when it comes to legislation that affects them. That is the very least this Parliament could be doing, and it is the very least we could do after the 200 years of harm that this place has caused First Nations people. For the Liberals and Nationals to use this as part of their disgraceful culture war I think is disgusting. I think they should come into the 21st century.

**Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (15:24):** Long before this building stood, long before this Parliament existed, this place was a site of ceremony, meeting, lawmaking and culture. It has been so for tens of thousands of years, and it remains so today through the continuing connection of First Peoples to this country. I rise today to speak in support of the requirement to prepare and table the statement of treaty compatibility, a reform that gives practical, meaningful effect to the commitments we made when this Parliament passed the Statewide Treaty Act 2025. Can I, at the outset, just mention that the British

actually broke their own laws by not establishing a treaty at colonisation, and the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 goes towards righting that very big wrong.

When we passed the Statewide Treaty Act, we made a clear decision that treaty would not be symbolic. We agreed it would be embedded in how government works and how this Parliament legislates. One of the obligations we accepted was that when a bill is introduced the member introducing it must also prepare a statement of treaty compatibility and table it before the second-reading speech. That creates the space for reflection and responsibility. It supports parliamentarians to consider from the outset how legislation may relate to First Peoples, whether the assembly of Gellung Warl has had an opportunity to provide advice, what perspectives were shared and whether the bill supports the advancement of First Peoples' rights. It also invites us to consider whether legislation aligns with core treaty objectives: advancing self-determination, addressing the impacts of historical injustice and supporting the equal enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. This is not about restriction, it is about better lawmaking.

We do this because history has taught us the cost of exclusion and the power of inclusion. For too long First Peoples were denied a role in decisions that shaped their own lives. That truth has now been formally acknowledged and documented through the Yoorrook Justice Commission, Australia's First Peoples-led truth-telling process. Yoorrook has been courageous, dignified and generous. It has created an official public record of the pain, the trauma, the appalling policies, the massacres, the stealing of land, the stealing of children – the real history and story of this state – to build a shared understanding to right the many wrongs of the past. Treaty is how we honour that truth by ensuring it leads to change.

Statements of treaty compatibility are one of the ways we ensure that the lessons of the past inform the decisions of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. This requirement does not give First Peoples additional votes in the Parliament, because we have heard a lot of mistruths and misunderstandings about what this does. It does not create a veto, it does not override the role of elected representatives and it does not reduce the rights of any Victorian. It requires members introducing legislation to explain whether and how a bill aligns with advice from Gellung Warl and whether it supports the treaty objectives this Parliament has endorsed. This is compatible with the existing charter of human rights statement of compatibility. It strengthens our democracy by ensuring we legislate with awareness, respect and responsibility.

Treaty makes sense because it builds on strengths, not deficits. It recognises that Aboriginal communities hold deep knowledge about what works for their families, cultures and communities, and it recognises that when people are trusted with decision-making power over the things that affect their lives, outcomes improve. Treaty is about self-determination in practice. It is about partnership rather than paternalism. It is about designing services and systems with communities, not just for them. This is not about spending more money. It is about using the resources we already have more wisely, more collaboratively and more effectively. The Allan Labor government is committed to walking alongside Aboriginal communities as treaty progresses, step by step, to support healing, strengthen culture and build a shared future for all Victorians.

It is essential that treaty is guided by the voices of First Peoples themselves. The co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg have described treaty as:

... a pathway to acknowledging the past and making real, practical change to achieve better outcomes for First Peoples in Victoria and to close the gap.

These words are grounded in lived experience, leadership and optimism. They reflect a commitment not only to justice for First Peoples but to a stronger, fairer society for everyone. This is the spirit in which statements of treaty compatibility have been designed. The Statewide Treaty Act establishes Gellung Warl, a democratic, independent and enduring representative body for First Peoples in Victoria. It brings together the First Peoples' Assembly as the decision-making arm; Nginma Ngainga Wara, to provide independent oversight of Closing the Gap commitments; and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna, preserving truth-telling as a foundation for healing. Gellung Warl sits within our existing

democratic framework. It has no veto power. It does not override Parliament. It is accountable to integrity and oversight bodies, just like any other public institution. This model respects both Aboriginal self-determination and parliamentary sovereignty. Treaty is not about division; it is about unity grounded in truth and healing. It recognises that Victoria's story did not begin in 1851. It honours more than 65,000 years of culture, lore and connection, while looking forward with confidence and hope. When we walk together, our whole state is stronger. It is about partnership. It is about progress. Treaty unites.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (15:31): I rise to speak on the motion which seeks to amend the standing orders to remove the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities from being the single statement of compatibility with future legislation and extend that into treaty principles as well. This place should deal with matters in a way that is equal, that upholds equality. I do want to say from the outset that earlier the Attorney-General was in the chamber, and these issues were raised at the beginning of this debate. The Leader of the Nationals spoke to that matter, and what he raised in his contribution was a concern that building a system whereby First People are consulted on proposed legislation before any member of Parliament considers it, other than potentially the minister themselves, by definition creates inequality. And the Attorney said, 'That's right. They're the First People. They're first.' The Attorney of Victoria confirmed to us across the table that what the government is proposing to do is by design. By design these changes are going to enable First People to consider legislation, before all other people. By definition that creates inequality. To hear the Attorney say that I think underlined our concerns. We think that legislation should be considered by all and by all Victorians, fair and reasonably, and that there should be an equal way in which we do that. The Attorney herself said, 'No, that's not the case. They're first. They go first.' Well, we do not agree with that, and so we will not be supporting the motion. We have not supported treaty, and we have committed to repeal it. We have been very clear about why that is.

I think it is also worth saying – this has not been raised in the debate yet – that the changes before the house are changes that will amend the standing orders. The standing orders, as most people in this chamber should know – I am not sure if all do know, but all people should know – are the rules of the chamber, effectively. That is a shorthand way of describing the rules of the chamber. This motion before the house has not gone before the Standing Orders Committee, so we are currently considering a potential change to the standing orders that the house has not considered by way of whether it should occur, the implications of it occurring and what will happen. That is why we have a Standing Orders Committee: to consider potential changes to standing orders, reasonably. Any changes to the standing orders you would think would go before a Standing Orders Committee. This has not gone before a Standing Orders Committee. This has not gone through, as far as I understand, any process before the house and not before the Standing Orders Committee.

When you make a change, you would think that you would do so before it being brought into this chamber. And why would that be? Perhaps there is some sense of time urgency, some immediate urgency. We have heard and we understand that the treaty received royal assent in November last year and was enacted in December last year. Well, we are now in May, some four months later, four months after treaty was enacted. At any point in that time you would think that this chamber could have considered what would happen if you made a change to the standing orders, just to ensure – even if you supported the change, even if there was universal agreement, which is clearly not the case here – that there were no unforeseen consequences, in terms of not just making the change but even the wording of the change, because wording matters, and the wording in this motion in and of itself has not been considered either. Could it be drafted better? Is it drafted poorly? Who would know, because the government did not take the motion through the Standing Orders Committee. But of course they did not, despite having four months to do so.

No, what I think and what we are all saying is: why is this motion being done today? Australians and Victorians are crying out about the pain they are going through with cost of living. Why is this being done today? Why? The cost-of-living pressure with things like fuel is crippling people. Why is it being

done today? Because the government wants to make an announcement on budget day that this is the first bill that has gone through that process. That is what this is about. This is being dealt with today because of the government's next media release. At any point over the last four months these standing order changes could have been made on any single parliamentary day. But no, they are doing it today. Why? Because the Parliament is now rising until budget day. The next bill, the first bill to go through this process, will be the budget. It is all about the circus for the Premier. She wants to be able to stand up with the Treasurer and say, 'Our budget is the first budget to ever have a statement of compatibility with First Nations people' – probably because it is going to be a stinker of a budget, I suspect. We know that last year the government had so little to say about the budget they stopped their own members from debating it in the chamber. There were, on my last count, about 20, 25 members who did not get to speak on their own budget. So it is very fair and reasonable on this motion to understand the timing – very fair and reasonable.

This is about the Treasurer, and I will be waiting on budget day. I am very, very sure that in the Treasurer's speech she will be saying this is the first bill that has ever gone through a statement of compatibility with First Nations people. That is what this is about – the circus of this government's media announcement. We can call it out. If the government cared about legislation being compatible with treaty principles, do you know when they would have made this change? The minute after treaty was legislated and enacted. They would have done it on day one, because with all of the legislation we have considered this year, none of it has gone through treaty assessment. None. Why? The government has had every opportunity to explain why they have not cared about all the legislation they have dealt with this year. Why haven't they? Because it is all about the circus. 'We are the first. We have to have,' the government will say, 'the first budget that has ever been delivered in this state that has treaty principle compatibility.' Seriously, is that how low this government has sunk? I would say Victorians who are going through a lot of pain at the moment are looking on right now and wondering, 'Why the heck is this government's priority doing this?' On budget day, when I hear the Treasurer and the Premier say they have got nothing else to say other than, 'We've got the first budget that's ever been treaty-compatible,' I think Victorians are going to look on and yawn. They are going to yawn and say, 'But what about helping us? What about helping our cost of living?' It is all a total scam.

You can understand exactly what the government is doing, can't you? The whole year of legislation they could have put through treaty principle processes, but they did not, because it is all about the media release. And we will see it on budget day. I have just called it out. So when you hear the Treasurer and the Premier rely on that as some great big announcement, we know what it is: one great big circus from this government.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (15:41): Goodness me, that was a nonsensical contribution from the member for Brighton. This is an outcome of the treaty process. Denying the pathway that was taken and some of the work that needs to be done and the 'Listen to me, I've worked it all out' Sherlock Holmes routine over there by the member for Brighton – the learned friend over there – stand in stark contrast to the really confused contentions that were put forward by the Leader of the Nationals, who of course used to be a chief of staff for now lower house One Nation leader Barnaby Joyce. You can see that he is working up his lines and working up his playbook of intervention into First Nations politics.

We saw his routine before, which was something totally extraordinary. He suggested to us that their Aboriginal affairs portfolio stands up to rigour and the treaty process does not stand up to differentiated outcomes for First Nations people. He brought forward this contention that all Victorians should be equal, while then saying that they will have an Aboriginal affairs portfolio that is differential to the Victorian people. What an extraordinary bluff and position to put forward. It was completely nonsensical, it was desperate and it had differing sorts of views across the journey. But fundamentally, the Leader of the Nationals had to say at least 12 times that they are opposed to treaty. No, we get it. We get it over on this side that those opposite will not listen to First Nations people. We understand that. We saw the disrespect that was provided by those opposite during that time. Will there, though,

be a political consequence to this? That is the key thing here. How many people were part of the yes vote in the Kew electorate and the Brighton electorate who see the difficult journey of the Liberal Party and the lack of compassion that they have for their fellow Victorians?

A statement of compatibility here is respectful. It is kind, it is empathetic and it is inclusive, and that is exactly why we are bringing it forward. The Leader of the Nationals had a really confused piece around whether we have seen this or done this before. The Leader of the Nationals should realise that we have a human rights charter that has a statement of compatibility and that we report against those milestones, and where a bill does not comply with those we articulate why. It is not a very controversial point if you have bothered to read a bit of legislation or a second-reading speech in your time. It is quite clear what the statement of compatibility will be and how it will contribute.

The fearmongering notion from that side was a bit of a ‘Let’s test our lines to see how they sound out loud when I’m defending a One Nation charge in the Nationals areas.’ That was really what that waffling speech was about. It had nothing to do with a pretty sensible thing that says treaty is now legislated. Let us be clear, those opposite continue to debate the merits of law that is now in Victoria. That is a really important point here. They might repeal it, but it is law now. If that is the notion put forward by the member for Brighton and the Leader of the Nationals, remember as well that the Leader of the Nationals said how strong the Westminster system is, how they respect democracy and how it is so important and these are fundamental principles – and yet law that has passed through this house is now law that should be not be respected. That is the waffling exercise that we see from those opposite, an incoherent approach that has seen them absolutely capitulate as a political movement nationally. We have seen this issue and other fringe elements of their parties and movements tear them to pieces. This is just another test case in a lack of empathy, a lack of kindness and a lack of compassion for Victorians to meet the outcomes of Closing the Gap and listen to First Nations people – isn’t that extraordinary – and to bring forward a kindness that says, ‘We will listen to you after the impacts of colonisation, after the impacts of a range of different legislation that has impacted and harmed First Nations people. You know what, we’re going to listen to you and have self-determination.’ What a kind thing to do, rather than, again, dictating what is in the interests of First Nations people.

I give it to those opposite for giving a stirring rendition of how to defy logic and stop the creep of their vote to One Nation, but we see this for what it is. This is more about the politics than it has ever been about the policy. We wish them well as Pauline Hanson continues to absolutely tear them to shreds.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (15:46): It is my pleasure to make a contribution around this notice of motion, which is a procedural motion, or rather, a substantive motion that deals with the procedures of this chamber and specifically the standing orders and standing order 62. I will take a moment to just refresh the house about the contents of standing order 62, which is that after the order of the day for the second reading of a bill the question to be proposed is that this bill now be read a second time and then, importantly, under 62(2), a statement of compatibility tabled under section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 will be incorporated in *Hansard*, without leave being required. This is a procedural provision that simply allows for statements of compatibility to be incorporated into *Hansard* without leave being required each time.

What this motion that we are debating right now before the chamber does is expand those statements of compatibility that can be incorporated into *Hansard* in that way to include statements of compatibility tabled under any act of Parliament. It is hardly a controversial matter, I would have thought, simply saying that we have statements of compatibility under the treaty legislation. I understand the opposition oppose treaty, and they will get their reckoning for that, do not worry about that. But it is hardly a controversial matter, I would have thought, to simply say – and I should use their official title because others have not – that statements of compatibility with treaty principles are incorporated into *Hansard* in exactly the same way as a statement of compatibility with the charter of human rights.

These are both very, very important components of the legislative process. There will always be an option to read aloud those statements. But of course, in the ordinary passage of legislative business through this chamber, we incorporate those into *Hansard*. We do not need to have a debate about whether they get incorporated. We do not need divisions on whether they get incorporated – I guess I mean capital ‘D’ divisions in this case. They simply get incorporated. That is a sensible rule of order of this place, a very sensible rule for this place. But of course what it cracks open and what we have heard in the contributions this afternoon is the very real division in this state between those who support treaty – and I would suggest to you, Acting Speaker Farnham, and to your colleagues that it is a majority of Victorians who support real enfranchising of Indigenous Victorians, who support making good on the wrongs of the past, who support doing better in the field of Indigenous affairs in this state – and those who oppose for a range of reasons. It might be fear or it might be racism. They might be running scared politically from some of the nasty, nasty forces that seem to be developing momentum in Australia’s body politic.

There are lots of things going on out there that would mediate against an easy discussion around the principles that are contained in the treaty bill. But to give credit where it is due, the Labor government has done a magnificent job in getting this treaty legislation through this Parliament. It has stuck to its word and stuck to its principles on this matter – not all matters but on this matter – and I think it has done an absolutely terrific job in making sure that this sits where it does at the apex of Victoria’s governance structure, the apex of Victoria’s public life.

Of course statements of compatibility with treaty principles should rank equally, *pari passu*, with statements of compatibility with the charter of human rights. They are an important part of the legislative process, because what could be more fair dinkum than saying to Indigenous Victorians, ‘We are now going to properly take into consideration your views on legislation that goes through this place’? The centuries of failure in this policy area cannot go on. Of course if things are to change then things must change, and one of those changes is a very important change: ensuring that this place does turn its mind to the impact on Indigenous Victorians of changes to legislation. Frankly, it is the least we could do. It is the least we could do to ensure that we hear those views – the views of that very important community, the views of that community that has been so appallingly treated for centuries and the views of the community that has been disenfranchised at almost every turn over the life of European settlement of this great continent. We have an opportunity now to say that we are listening and, not only that, that we have built into the legislative process acknowledgement, understanding, empathy and a very real engagement with the Indigenous community through the mechanisms that are available to this Parliament.

I say to those who might oppose this motion: give life and effect to the Statewide Treaty Act 2025. It is not a bill anymore, it is an act. Give life and effect to the treaty process, which was such an important process and a marquee achievement of this government. Give life and effect to the aspirations of Indigenous Victorians, who have been disenfranchised so often in this place and disenfranchised so often in public life in Victoria. This is a minor change to the standing orders of the operation of this chamber, but it stands for a hell of a lot more. It stands for the principle that we as a legislature are listening, and I encourage all members to adopt that approach.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:53): I desire to move:

That the question be now put.

**The SPEAKER:** I will allow one more speaker.

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (15:53): I rise to speak on this motion, and I want to begin with something straightforward: First Nations Australians have the oldest continuous culture on earth. Their connection to this land, their communities, their families and their aspirations for a better future deserve our absolute respect, our genuine commitment and our action. But respect is not the same thing as this motion. Genuine commitment is not this motion, and meaningful action, the kind that

actually improves lives, is certainly not this motion. This is not a pathway to better outcomes for First Nations communities, it is a pathway to paralysis. It is complexity dressed up as compassion.

Let me tell you what I hear in Prahran. I hear from small business owners who cannot afford to keep staff because the cost of running a business in this state has become punishing, I hear from renters spending more than half their income on housing and I hear from parents who are choosing between heating their homes and buying their children new school shoes. These are not hypothetical pressures, these are absolute lived realities of the people that I represent, and in this moment this government brings a motion to embed treaty requirements into every piece of legislation it enacts.

Let me be precise about what this Statewide Treaty Act 2025 actually creates, because the government would prefer, basically, that we do not look closely at the detail. The act establishes a statutory obligation – not a discretionary aspiration, a legal requirement – for the government to consult the First Peoples' Assembly on new laws that affect Indigenous peoples. And here is the critical question this government refuses to answer plainly: what laws qualify? The treaty framework explicitly covers health, education, housing, justice, land, cultural heritage and economic development. A bill on public housing, a bill on bail reform, a bill adjusting land tax: every one of those will touch First Peoples under this framework. The scope is so broad and so deliberately undefined that in practice it reaches into almost every significant piece of legislation this Parliament considers. The government has created an obligation so expansive it has no practical boundaries. It also affects housing, health, even justice and the budget – they are all in its scope.

Parliamentary debate confirmed that new tax measures affecting all Victorians must undergo treaty compatibility review and potential assembly consultation. That is not a modest procedural addition; that is a structural requirement embedded in law applied to budget and fiscal policy that affects every single Victorian. Lest any member suggest this is merely aspirational, I draw the chamber's attention to the notice of motion given on 1 April by the member for Kalkallo: that standing order 62 is to be amended so that formal statements of compatibility apply not just under the charter of human rights but under any act of Parliament. The effect, operative from 30 April, is that every single bill introduced into this house will require a formal statement of treaty compatibility tabled alongside its charter statement, and the machinery of this motion is the standing orders of this Parliament from next month. From 30 April every bill in this Parliament carries a new formal requirement: a statement of treaty compatibility tabled as a matter of standing. It is not a future ambition – next month.

Nor does the architecture stop there. Gellung Warl, the new permanent body the act creates, delivers an annual address to a joint sitting of both houses of this Parliament, and among the future aspirations explicitly listed in the treaty framework is the establishment of a third chamber of Parliament. No veto today, but a third chamber of Parliament is explicitly on this government's agenda. This motion asks us to embed the foundations of that architecture into every single bill. And who staffs and funds this expanded framework? Not volunteers. We are talking about a permanent statutory authority drawing on consolidated revenue requiring whole divisions of public servants: treaty advisers, compliance officers and legal counsel – an institutional ecosystem that by the government's own design is intended to grow with every subsequent treaty negotiation across health, education, housing and justice. The Statewide Treaty Act mentions Closing the Gap targets twice in 250 pages and contains no binding obligations on the government to actually meet them. Process without accountability, obligation without outcome: this is the signature of this government.

While this government constructs this architecture, let me tell this chamber what it is not doing. On the budget, Victoria's net debt has soared to more than \$150 billion in the general government sector, growing by more than \$2 million every single hour. Interest costs now run at \$6.8 billion a year. A decade ago, when the coalition last held office, net debt was \$21.8 billion, and it is now forecast to reach nearly \$194 billion within three years. Victorians are the most heavily taxed people in the country, and this government's answer is to add yet another permanent, funded, growing institutional obligation to the public accounts with no binding requirement to show a single dollar of benefit.

Victoria's net debt grows by more than \$2 million every single hour. In a decade it has increased almost ninefold, and this government's answer is more process, more ideology and more cost.

On housing, Victorians cannot afford to buy houses. Victorians cannot afford to rent. The planning system is broken. Development approvals take years. Supply cannot meet demand, and the government's own housing targets are already off track. And yet here we are, adding treaty compatibility requirements to planning and housing legislation and creating new friction in a system that is already failing the people who need it the most. Victorians cannot afford to buy, Victorians cannot afford to rent, and this government's answer is to add more process to the housing laws that are already failing them.

On crime, too many Victorians, including in my own electorate, feel unsafe in our public spaces, in our streets and on public transport. The community safety conversation in Victoria is serious, and it is absolutely urgent. The government is not delivering the accountability, the sentencing framework and all the investment in frontline policing that the community is asking for. Instead, basically it debates institutional architecture. People in Prahran feel unsafe in their own streets. They are not asking for a new chamber of Parliament, they are asking for a government that takes their safety seriously.

On health, emergency departments are under strain and pressure. Elective surgery waiting lists remain unacceptably long. Mental health services are stretched. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System produced recommendations that this –

**Belinda Wilson:** On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Prahran, this is a narrow debate, so I would ask you to come back to the debate.

**Rachel WESTAWAY:** The point that I am making is that the infrastructure that this is creating and the costs that it is creating are affecting every single Victorian. And really, at a time of cost-of-living pressures, why are we tolerating these sorts of things? That does go to my point, and it does go to what we are talking about, because everything affects Victorians. When we are under cost-of-living pressures, we absolutely need to take this into consideration.

I want to return to where I began, because it is important. Nobody in this chamber disputes the importance of working with First Nations people and communities towards genuine self-determination, genuine economic participation and genuine recognition of their rights and their culture, but embedding statutory consultation obligations across every significant legislative domain is not how you improve lives. You do not improve outcomes for First Nations Victorians by creating a treaty compatibility review for every single tax measure. You improve outcomes by resourcing communities directly. You improve outcomes by reducing bureaucratic gatekeeping and listening to community leaders about what they are actually needing. The act's own silence on binding Closing the Gap obligations tells you absolutely everything you need to know about where this government's true priorities lie.

The people I represent are practical. They are generous. They believe in fairness, and they believe in doing right by all Victorians. But they are also clear-eyed. They know the difference between a government genuinely working on their behalf and a government working on its own ideological agenda and calling it virtue. The people of Prahran want a government focused on the budget, on housing, on safety and on health, not on one building a third chamber of Parliament while Victorians struggle. The people of Prahran want a government that sets this state up for success, not one that layers obligation upon obligation while the practical problems that define daily life remain unsolved. We can and we must do better.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, there are a significant number of members on this side of the chamber who are wishing to speak. I want to provide you with that background because there are a significant number of members who wish to speak, and so far only two Liberals have

spoken. As a proportion of the chamber, clearly that is a very unrepresentative proportion by comparison to how many have had the opportunity, and I would be concerned if a gag motion were moved on changing the entire rules of this chamber without members having an opportunity to speak.

**The SPEAKER:** The ruling on that point of order is that it is for me to determine.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoorra – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (16:04): I move:

That the question be now put.

**Assembly divided on Colin Brooks's motion:**

*Ayes (53):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (26):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

**Assembly divided on Ros Spence's motion:**

*Ayes (53):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills***Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026***Council's amendments*

**The SPEAKER** (16:12): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 with amendments.

**Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.**

**Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 1, page 3, line 13, omit "amendments." and insert "amendments;"
2. Clause 1, page 3, after line 13, insert –
  - (i) the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977** –
    - (i) to confer a power on the Minister to direct persons to give the Minister information relating to the production, supply, distribution, sale, use or consumption of a fuel and create related offences; and
    - (ii) to increase the penalty for certain existing offences against the Act."
3. Clause 34, omit this clause.
4. Insert the following New Part after Part 12 –

**'Part 12A – Amendment of Fuel Emergency Act 1977****58A Definitions**

In section 2 of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977** insert the following definitions –

**"Commonwealth Minister** means the Minister administering the Liquid Fuel Emergency Act 1984 of the Commonwealth;

**information direction** means a direction under section 2A;"

**58B New sections 2A to 2D inserted**

After section 2 of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977** insert –

**"2A Directions for the giving of information relating to the production, supply, distribution, sale, use or consumption of a fuel**

- (1) The Minister, by written notice, may direct a person to give the Minister information, in the person's possession or control, relating to the production, supply, distribution, sale, use or consumption of a fuel.
- (2) A notice under subsection (1) must specify –
  - (a) the kind of fuel (the *specified fuel*); and
  - (b) the kind of information that the person must give the Minister; and
  - (c) the manner and form in which the person must give the Minister the information; and
  - (d) the date by which the person must give the information to the Minister.
- (3) A notice under subsection (1) may be given during a period of emergency.
- (4) In addition, a notice under subsection (1) may be given when there is no period of emergency if and only if the Minister is of the view that –
  - (a) there is or is likely to be a threat to the production, supply or distribution of the specified fuel; and
  - (b) the kind of information specified in the notice is relevant for the planning of, and preparation for, the production, supply, distribution or sale of the specified fuel to ensure a sufficient amount of the specified fuel will remain available to meet the reasonable requirements of the community.
- (5) To avoid doubt, section 41A of the **Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984** applies to this section.

**2B Compliance with information direction**

A person who is given an information direction must comply with the direction unless the person has a lawful excuse.

Penalty: In the case of a natural person, 60 penalty units.

In the case of a body corporate, 2500 penalty units.

**2C False and misleading information**

A person must not, in purported compliance with an information direction, give information to the Minister that the person knows is false or misleading in a material particular.

Penalty: In the case of a natural person, 60 penalty units.

In the case of a body corporate, 2500 penalty units.

**2D Confidentiality**

(1) A person given confidential or commercially sensitive information under an information notice must not disclose that information.

Penalty: 120 penalty units.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to a disclosure of confidential or commercially sensitive information of the following kind –

- (a) a disclosure made with the consent of the person who gave the confidential or commercially sensitive information; or
- (b) a disclosure made for the purposes of the exercise of a power or the performance of a function under, or in connection with, this Act or the regulations; or
- (c) a disclosure made to the Commonwealth Minister for the purpose of administering the Liquid Fuel Emergency Act 1984 of the Commonwealth; or
- (d) a disclosure made by the Minister for the purposes of any arrangement entered into by the Minister and the Commonwealth Minister under section 15(1) of the Liquid Fuel Emergency Act 1984 of the Commonwealth; or
- (e) a disclosure made in the performance of a function or exercise of a power under the Liquid Fuel Emergency Act 1984 of the Commonwealth that is delegated, under section 49 of that Act, to –
  - (i) the Minister; or
  - (ii) an officer or employee of the State; or
  - (iii) a person who constitutes, is a member of, or is employed by, an authority established by or under a law of Victoria; or
- (f) a disclosure made to a court or tribunal in the course of legal proceedings; or
- (g) a disclosure made pursuant to an order of a court or tribunal; or
- (h) a disclosure of confidential or commercially sensitive information that is in the public domain at the time of the disclosure.”.

**58C Compliance with directions etc. of Minister**

In section 5(1) of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977**, after “direction” (where first occurring) **insert** “(other than an information direction)”.

**58D Application and operation of directions etc.**

In section 7(1) and (2) of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977**, after “direction” **insert** “(other than an information direction)”.

**58E Provision for compensation to persons complying with directions**

In section 8(1) of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977**, after “direction” (where first occurring) **insert** “(other than an information direction)”.

**58F Section 9 amended**

(1) Insert the following heading to section 9 of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977** –

**“General offence”.**

- (2) In section 9(1) of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977**, after “direction” insert “(other than an information direction)”.
  - (3) In section 9(2) of the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977**, for “50 penalty units” substitute “in the case of a natural person, 120 penalty units and in the case of a body corporate, 2500 penalty units.”.
5. Long title, after “**Restricting Non-disclosure Agreements (Sexual Harassment at Work) Act 2025**” insert “, the **Fuel Emergency Act 1977** to confer a power on the Minister to direct persons to give the Minister information relating to the production, supply, distribution, sale, use or consumption of a fuel and create related offences and to increase the penalty for certain existing offences against that Act”.

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (16:13): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

There are a couple of groups of amendments that I wish to make some brief comments on. The amendments are, firstly, to the Fuel Emergency Act 1977 to enable the minister – as the Minister for Energy and Resources, that is me – to compel fuel suppliers to provide information that would help with contingency planning. Victoria already receives fuel supply data from the Commonwealth and directly from the industry in terms of the current global fuel crisis, but this amendment will enable the provision of end-to-end supply data outside of an emergency declaration and create a consistent reporting standard for all fuel businesses across the state. With accurate information, Victoria will be well placed to act quickly and, if required, to intervene to keep essential services, regional communities, freight and agriculture moving.

It is also important to note that there is a very strong collective effort at a national level. With the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions, we have developed the *National Fuel Security Plan*, which was agreed to at national cabinet last week. The plan includes four alert levels to provide clear guidance to Australians about the situation that is occurring as a result of the war in Iran. At present we are at level 2, which is ‘Keeping Australia moving’. At this level we know that the global outlook remains unpredictable, and it is the responsibility of all governments to plan ahead in case the situation worsens. In accordance with that plan, Victoria is strengthening our fuel security and preparedness. In addition to the regular industry meetings, we have appointed a class 2 energy controller under the emergency management framework to coordinate across government.

I also wish to comment on the second house amendment, which relates to the Local Government Act 2020. The government considers further amendment to the bill is needed in relation to clause 34. Under previous iterations of section 146 of the Local Government Act, arbiters had the flexibility to first consider if conduct that was the subject of an application would more appropriately be dealt with as an application for serious misconduct before referring it on. Clause 34 sought to reinstate this flexibility. However, the government is mindful that as it has only been a short time since the last reforms to this provision in 2024, it is more appropriate to allow the provisions to continue to operate as they are and for it to remain mandatory for arbiters to refer serious misconduct applications to the chief municipal inspector. This will allow more time for the Department of Government Services and the Department of Justice and Community Safety to monitor the operation of the provision and provide for a use case for further reform at a further point in time. After discussions and consultations across the chamber and in the interests of passing the important changes to the Fuel Emergency Act, the government is not proceeding with this part of the bill.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (16:17): This is another example of where the government does not get its legislation right. What they brought to this chamber was a regulatory reform bill, and as we know, there was very little in the way of regulatory reform contained within the original piece of proposed legislation that came to this Assembly. It got through this Assembly – we debated all of the proposed clauses across some nine portfolios and several acts – and it went to the Legislative Council only to find two things: that the government were going to make amendments to one of the existing

clauses and that they were going to be opportunistic and use this regulatory reform bill to insert a new series of amendments relating to fuel, given the fuel crisis that the world, Australia and Victoria are experiencing in relation to the conflict over in Iran. We do have a number of concerns in relation to that particular amendment. We will not be opposing these amendments, but we do have a number of concerns with that particular amendment relating to amending the Fuel Emergency Act 1977, which I will get to later.

First I will deal with the government's amendment changes in relation to the Local Government Act 2020. When this government first brought the legislation to the Assembly last sitting week, one of the proposed amendments in that original piece of legislation from the government was to amend the Local Government Act 2020 to amend the definition of 'serious misconduct' and VCAT's jurisdiction with respect to applications disputing the validity of an election. That was essentially the thrust of the changes that this government was seeking to make in relation to the Local Government Act. It is part 8 of the legislation that I am referring to, in the original piece of legislation. Clause 34 was particularly problematic. Clause 34 was where the government – again, before I get into this, this was a regulatory reform bill, and in the main, most of the proposed amendments that the government was seeking to make in this Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 did not pertain to any inquiries or reviews, with no reform arising from a parliamentary inquiry, external body or otherwise. They were just ideas from departments that they had, through a sweep of looking at pieces of legislation, to introduce.

We were very curious about this particular clause 34 of the government's bill under which arbiters would now have discretion as to whether they refer serious misconduct matters to the chief municipal inspector rather than being compelled to do so. The status quo was that arbiters – and under the councillor conduct panel powers – were mandatorily required to refer matters of serious misconduct to the chief municipal inspector. The proposed change that this government was seeking to make, as I said, was curious. It was not informed by any review. We asked about this in the bill briefing in fact; it was not informed by any information. There was nothing from the minister in his second-reading speech or that the minister's office or the department could provide to us as to why they were making this change where all of a sudden arbiters would now have discretion in relation to referring matters of serious misconduct to the chief municipal inspector as opposed to mandatorily being required to do so. So the basis for that amendment was absolutely unclear. It potentially was a resourcing issue, if nothing else, which I find astonishing and staggering – that actually this government was seeking to find ways for arbiters to weasel out of referring matters of serious misconduct.

When it comes to matters of serious misconduct, we should absolutely be reporting those and making those reports. There should not be any opportunity for those to not be reported, any grey areas in this case. So we were very curious about this particular change. As I said, the minister did not refer to the amendment in the second-reading speech at all. On this particular clause 34 in their original bill, the minister did not refer to that in his second-reading speech, yet it was a feature of the legislation.

What we found on this side when we were reading this legislation – we do not rely just on the minister's second-reading speech. I actually read the clauses and proposals within the legislation, and in doing so, it struck me that this may actually result in serious misconduct matters not being referred. That is quite a problematic thing; that is actually wrong. For this Labor government to have proposed that amendment in their original legislation when it came to the Assembly last sitting week, was just wrong – absolutely wrong. The amendments that they had proposed would also have enabled the councillor conduct panel to impose the same sanctions for a finding of misconduct that an arbiter could also impose, making those provisions consistent. The previous amendment, which expanded the sanctions of an arbiter, could fail to update the same sanctions of the councillor conduct panel. So it was seemingly confused and ill thought out.

As I said, this was not the result of any inquiry, any parliamentary inquiry or other external recommendation to the government. Had it been, they would have freely given that information in the bill briefing, but they did not. There was nothing informing this change. We thought when it comes to

matters of serious misconduct there should absolutely be a requirement for these bodies to report on this information, not give arbiters any way out of reporting on it. In terms of this, what we found – what we contemplated – was that the removal of the requirement that arbiters must refer apparent serious misconduct matters to the chief municipal inspector, now making it discretionary, did really raise serious questions for us as to why they had required this change.

While the change, from the government's perspective, might improve efficiency and reduce delays where matters are likely to be referred back to the arbiter, a finding of serious misconduct carries significant penalties under the act, including substantial fines, suspensions and potential disqualification from council elections. A query really did remain as to whether these matters should still be considered by the chief municipal inspector to determine whether the chief municipal inspector or the councillor conduct panel is best placed to deal with them. That really was our thinking. That was what we were thinking when we read this clause – scratching our heads, thinking, 'Why did the government insert this clause at all? Why would they be making it easier for serious misconduct issues to not be referred? It makes no sense whatsoever.' So we proposed an amendment in the Legislative Council to actually omit this clause, clause 34, so that all of the words in clause 34 be removed. That was our proposed textual amendment in the Legislative Council, and it was so that we retain the status quo, so that we retain the mandatory obligation on arbiters to refer instances of serious misconduct to the chief municipal inspector. Labor wanted to make it easier for serious misconduct to not be reported on, and the mind boggles as to why that is the case, because there are penalties, there is a process – all of those things. We said no, matters of serious misconduct should absolutely be required to be referred. We proposed an amendment in the Legislative Council to omit this clause, to retain the status quo, and we succeeded. The government has fallen on its sword in relation to this matter and has withdrawn this clause.

**Belinda Wilson** interjected.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Read the amendments. The government has had to fall on its sword on this matter and realise the errors of its ways and the fact that this original proposal was not informed by any inquiry. It was not reforming whatsoever. They inserted this clause, and if you actually read the amendments that have been circulated, which we are debating and discussing right now here in the chamber, the government have withdrawn clause 34 from their original bill. As the minister's office has conceded to me, that is an exact mirror of our amendment in the Legislative Council, so they have actually accepted our proposal. We have had success in this area where we saw the government was trying to be secretive and limit transparency and limit the referral of serious misconduct matters. We have said no, that should not be the case; serious misconduct matters should still be referred. The government have realised that they stuffed up on this one and have actually agreed to our amendment by removing clause 34 of the original bill, withdrawing that clause, and now the status quo will be the case. For issues and matters of serious misconduct, arbiters will still be required to report those to the chief municipal inspector. So that is a positive, and I think that demonstrates a good thing about this Parliament, actually. The government have a very, very weak legislative agenda, and when they rush to bring in legislation, when they do a bit of a sweep of multiple portfolios and multiple acts and seek to label it as regulatory reform, really all that does is signal that there are going to be issues and errors.

We identified a glaring error in relation to that clause 34, which the government has now withdrawn, because we thought, 'Why would arbiters no longer be compelled, under these changes, to refer conduct that involves serious misconduct to the chief municipal inspector?' Was it because this Allan Labor government have such poor financial management that they lack the resources perhaps to investigate serious misconduct in our councils? Or is it because this government is no longer interested in integrity measures and eradicating corruption from councils? That is really where we got to. The fact that they had this clause at all in the first place is, as I say, because – we believe that with this Labor government it is either one of two things. It was either completely due to financial mismanagement, skyrocketing debt and a complete basket case of a budget that this government got to the point where they lacked the resources to investigate matters of serious misconduct and so then

tried to make it easier. 'Let's say to the arbiters to just not worry about referring those cases of misconduct, because we actually don't have the resources to investigate them.' That is disgraceful, but that is one of the reasons why the government may have sought to do this in the first place. The other reason is that they are just not interested in integrity measures – that they are just not interested in integrity and weeding out corruption from councils. Again, that is why they sought to remove the mandatory requirement to refer matters of serious misconduct. We, in reading the legislation, caught them out on this. We proposed that amendment in the Legislative Council, and I thank my colleagues in the Legislative Council for putting that amendment that was drafted to the Council. We have had that success. We have embarrassed the government in this situation and forced their hand. They have withdrawn clause 34, so that is a success.

The other key reason and what I assume the government suggests is the main reason for the amendments coming back to the Legislative Assembly today in relation to this Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 relates essentially to fuel. We have a fuel crisis; everyone knows that. Everyone in Victoria and right around Australia is faced with significant pressures at the moment relating to fuel – the access to fuel, the price and affordability of fuel – and how that is impacting families; how that is impacting small, medium and large businesses; how it is impacting our manufacturers; and how it is impacting our farmers, particularly in my community, where public transport is not so accessible, where we have no train beyond Lilydale and where we have limited buses and bus routes. Public transport is difficult to access. People rely on their cars, and families who are already doing it tough in a cost-of-living crisis are now having to do it tougher with the fuel crisis and the fuel prices.

Supply is obviously an issue, particularly for farmers. In my electorate, the Evelyn electorate, we have wonderful agricultural producers and farmers. Whether it is our wineries – obviously everyone loves their wine – our fruit producers, our strawberry growers, our cherry growers or our cattle farmers, they are all concerned about the price of fuel but also the availability and accessibility of fuel. So I can understand conceptually why the government sought to introduce this amendment and why they have sought to make a move here, but I think it is an example of this government being slow to act. We have known about this fuel crisis for some time now. Certainly the families, small businesses and farmers in my community have known about this fuel crisis for some time now. Other governments have made changes and acted. This government had done nothing until this week, when they realised that it would be prudent, perhaps, to introduce some form of legislation that might assist with the supply of fuel around the state, given we have experienced fuel supply issues, particularly in regional Victoria. We have frustratingly and sadly seen a number of instances of fuel theft, including, disgracefully, from farms in fire-affected Victoria, where fuel has been stolen. Really the question is: how are we getting fuel to the right parts of Victoria that really need it?

The government have realised that they have been doing absolutely nothing, despite other state and territory governments doing something, and I would imagine that after the national cabinet that occurred on Monday there was some discussion about what the state governments are doing in relation to the fuel issues. Unsurprisingly, on Monday afternoon we heard first from this government about them going to try and do something about it and trying to find a way to get some sort of legislative change through this sitting week before Easter. So it was not until Monday afternoon of this week that we heard from the government that they sought to insert amendments in the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2026 relating to it. It is a vehicle. They had not done the work.

Despite this fuel crisis having been going on for weeks now, they had done no work to put forward an actual amendment to the fuel act directly. I do not know what they were doing. Probably the Premier and the Deputy Premier were doing numbers and worrying about their low approval ratings or something. They are so busy with that that they actually forgot that families, small businesses, manufacturers and farmers are really worried about the cost-of-living crisis and about the fuel crisis and that people in our community – Victorians – are absolutely worried about the fuel crisis. They are worried about affordability and accessibility of fuel, and finally when this Labor government were

woken up by the national cabinet on Monday morning of this week, on Monday afternoon of this week they finally came with a haphazard sort of drafting of amendments.

As I said, this is a regulatory legislation amendment reform bill. This is not about regulatory reform, this fuel amendment. I appreciate that the government has needed to have some legislative change in relation to fuel here, but this is not the way to do it. This is just another rush job where the government goes, 'Oh gosh, we've run out of time. We've got an issue. We actually have to try to be seen to be doing something on fuel.'

*Members interjecting.*

**Bridget VALLENCE:** Member for Brighton, the men on the Labor side always seek to talk over me, so I am quite used to it now. I am quite used to the Labor men trying to speak over me and other female members of the Liberal team. We are very used to that, but we press on. Basically this government realised that they had done nothing about the fuel crisis, and they are trying to find a way to say that they have done something. So they have gone, 'Goodness, we haven't actually done any of the drafting legislative work on this yet. What vehicle is available to us to use? Oh, there is a regulatory reform bill; let's insert a clause there. Despite the fact it's got nothing to do with regulatory reform, let's use that as a device, as a vehicle, to get this in.' We appreciate the concept and the reasoning behind it, and we will not be opposing it, but we do think that this is just indicative of the chaotic nature of this government. They are not thinking forward, and they are well behind the eight ball when it comes to how other states are dealing with this. I mean, the Western Australian Parliament has called a state of emergency. This government – we asked in question time – have not yet.

We are concerned in relation to some of this. Whilst we will not be opposing it, we are actually somewhat concerned about the nature of the fuel amendments. As I said, we were briefed on Monday afternoon of this week at 5:15 pm, and even in that briefing when Minister D'Ambrosio's office were giving us a briefing on these proposed changes, the proposed house amendments that they were bringing to this bill, admitted that they had not even given us the latest amendments. So the amendments that they had emailed through to me and my colleague Mr Davis in the other house were not even the latest amendments. The amendments that were before us, which they had forwarded to us and that they said they were going to brief us on, were not even the actual amendments that they were going to be submitting into the chamber. I think that just shows the rush job of this. It was absolutely rushed through.

Clearly there is a significant issue in the Middle East when it comes to fuel and fuel supplies coming all the way to Australia. We are on the other side of the world. When fuel is being transported, it is a challenge for us to make sure it gets all the way down to Australia. Because of fuel shortages, there are other countries who are willing to compete harder than Australia for this fuel and to pay more for those shipments of fuel, so that does cause massive issues for us in terms of supply and price. But for the fuel that does get here, we do need to make sure that it does get into the right places.

What these amendments do is really wide reaching. They are not narrowcast to the immediacy of the current fuel crisis in relation to the war in Iran right now. They are not narrowcast to that. They are really wide reaching. In fact they are giving the minister broad and wideranging powers that are even well beyond the challenges we are facing right now with the current fuel crisis here in Victoria. The government will say it is about getting fuel to the retailers in the parts of Victoria that are currently suffering fuel shortages – that is what they will say it is about – but it actually gives much further and broad-reaching powers to the minister. Essentially, it is conferring a power on the minister to direct persons to give the minister information relating to the production, supply, distribution, sale, use or consumption of a fuel and create related offences. But when it refers to fuel, it means all fuels. It does not just mean the diesel and petrol that we are putting in cars that is coming through from Iran; it is all fuels. So that is of particular concern to us.

Equally, there is a new power to direct for information and there are new offences that go with that. But we asked about it in the briefing, and the minister's office confirmed that every truck driver, every farmer, every petrol station owner and every person involved in the production of fuel, supply of fuel and distribution, sale and consumption of fuel can be required to give information to the minister. We would ask: why does the minister need that? It is also on a broad range of fuels. For example, it applies to oil, gas, condensate, LPG and refined products. This is a very broad range of data that the government is seeking. What is curious is that much of this information is already provided, particularly by the large wholesalers and retailers and distributors, to the Commonwealth. So we say: have this Labor government actually engaged with their brothers and sisters in the federal Labor government to say, 'Can we access that information?' They may say, 'It's aggregated; it's not disaggregated for Victoria.' That is absolute rubbish. These providers are already giving this information freely to the Commonwealth government and to the ACCC, so this is just another example of duplication of effort, asking providers to give the Victorian government the same information that – or in fact more information than – they are already providing to the ACCC and the Commonwealth government. You have got to ask: why is that? Why do they want such broad, wide-reaching powers? Only to appear that they are doing something.

But I think there is something sneaky in this. They could not really say in the ministerial briefing that we received only a few days ago why they needed these extensive powers, particularly on fuels that are not currently an issue in relation to the war in Iran. Also, this is not about a fuel emergency. They were very confused. They said, 'There's no fuel emergency now. We don't think we'll have to use the powers. There might be a fuel emergency, and we might use the fuel powers.' These are pre-emergency powers – that is what they called them. So the minister can issue a direction outside an emergency if they believe there is likely to be a threat to production, supply or distribution, but there are actually no definitions. There is nothing strict around that rule. It is very opaque, very broad. It is really curious as to why they are asking for such broad powers and are not confining them to the situation that we are faced with at the moment. They could not be clear with us whether they are seeking this information from all suppliers.

There is a direction under subsection (1) that they may not require a person to provide information that the person has already provided or is required to provide to the ACCC or the Australian Energy Market Operator within 12 months preceding the date of the direction to the extent that the information is accessible to the minister under clauses 2C and 2D. This is probably a reasonable area here. There is no information gap, particularly the AEMO gas statement of opportunities and the ACCC's gas inquiry reporting regime. The minister can access this data through the existing Commonwealth interface. So we say: why isn't this Allan Labor government already doing that? Why isn't this Allan Labor government already accessing this data to help? If the purpose is to get fuel to those parts of regional Victoria that need it, why aren't they accessing the data that is already being provided by suppliers and distributors to the Commonwealth government?

We know there is a fuel crisis and we understand that, but we have not received the assurance that even individual truck drivers will not be required to provide this information, this bureaucracy. We will not be opposing these amendments, but they are curious, and we will be watching very, very closely.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert):** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

*Motions***TAFE funding****Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this house commends the Allan Labor government for restoring TAFE in Victoria with more than \$16 billion in investment and legislating free TAFE, which has saved students more than \$777 million in tuition fees.

**And Bridget Vallence's amendment:**

That the words 'but notes the Silver review was scathing of the performance of Victoria's TAFE system under the Allan Labor government and that real recurrent expenditure per annual hour in Victoria is the lowest in the nation' be added to the end of the motion.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:47): I am very pleased to be able to rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. This is going to be a hallmark of the Allan Labor government. We are going to enshrine free TAFE into law. It is going to be a hallmark of this government, but it would be a stain on those opposite should they ever get into government with talks of cutting free TAFE, which is why we are having to go ahead and we are debating this here today. We know history shows us that those opposite, the Liberal Party, the last time they were in government sacked 2000 TAFE teachers, shut down 22 campuses and ripped out over \$1 billion from TAFE across Victoria. What an astounding record in just the four years they were last in government. This could not be in starker contrast with this Allan Labor government.

It should be said that in this place our TAFE and training system is something that time and time again people on this side of the house have stood up to speak passionately about. On this side of the house we feel incredibly proud of our record achievement when it comes to TAFE and the training system. Our government's free TAFE policy has seen tens of thousands of Victorians skill up and saved apprentices, get this – I was talking about this yesterday to some of the apprentices here in Parliament – over \$3000 in course fees. When I asked some of those amazing apprentices who attended Parliament yesterday how much they saved, they could not put a number on it but they knew it was in the thousands. When I told them on average it was 3000 bucks, they could not believe it. I said, 'Imagine what kind of great holiday you could have with that and what other things \$3000 could be spent on.'

Like I said, our record could not be in starker contrast to those opposite. Since coming to government, Labor has invested over \$16 billion in new and base funding in our TAFE and training system, including \$660 million in 45 new and upgraded TAFE campuses right across Victoria. I would challenge those opposite to name one single new TAFE that they went ahead and built. Victorians absolutely love TAFE, and this motion is about guaranteeing access to free TAFE and ensuring that 70 per cent of all vocational education funding goes to TAFEs, given that is where 70 per cent of Victorian apprentices are trained.

I also recently read a staggering figure, and the member for Evelyn might appreciate this. When we are talking about apprentices and TAFE students, guess how many women have enrolled in TAFE – this is also why it is so important: 60 per cent of enrolled TAFE students are women. It is giving women and young women across this state incredible opportunity. It is training them up for the jobs that they could only dream about and hope for. I was talking to a wonderful bunch of women downstairs yesterday, having a hot cross bun. I was talking to them about their TAFE courses. They pointed out that if it was not for free TAFE, firstly, they would not have looked at even doing a TAFE course and, if it was not for free TAFE, they would not have been able to enrol. They were able to peruse such a wide range of courses. A lot of the young women that attended Parliament yesterday were doing a diploma of nursing, and it was just so wonderful to stand and talk to them and find out how they came about enrolling in a TAFE course. They made it absolutely clear that the fact that it is free enabled them to enrol quicker to get on, get the skills and train to end up being one of our amazing nurses in our world-class healthcare system here in Victoria.

It was wonderful to meet a young woman and – I have to say it, because I am super biased, being a westie – she was from West Footscray and such a wonderful young person. We were talking about where the best hot cross buns are in Melbourne’s west actually, and I gave her some really good ideas.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** It is definitely not Woolies. She was so passionate about doing a diploma of nursing, and all I could think was how wonderful it was to have such a young woman feel so strongly about the course she is enrolled in. She could not wait to get out there and be a nurse. Do you know where she wanted to be a nurse? Come on, I talk about it enough here and so does the member for Footscray. Footscray Hospital: \$1.5 billion, planned, built and opened by this Labor government. That is what Labor governments do. Do you know what else she mentioned? That it is so cool that she could be so close to home and work at such an amazing, world-class, first-class hospital. She was so proud as a westie. I had to have a second hot cross bun after that. Really, where do you stop?

What we know is that Victoria is the birthplace of the free TAFE system – what a legacy. I remember back in 2018 when I was first running for election and was telling folks that we were helping young Victorians skill up for high-paying jobs in high-priority industries. It is funny having those conversations in the outer west because folks in the outer west know that TAFE is a great pathway for our kids to get qualified. But we are not just the birthplace of free TAFE, we are actually the national leader in this space, and that is something to feel super proud of. The Albanese Labor government in Canberra – I am not going to say copied, but let us face it – have rolled out fee-free TAFE nationwide. The birthplace of free TAFE is now a nation leader and other states have followed, which means hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are going to benefit from free TAFE. That is because Victoria was a nation-first. That is something to feel so proud of. That is something that is in absolute stark contrast to those opposite, who spent four years cutting and gutting TAFE and training services here in Victoria. We value it so much and we have invested in it so much that we are going to enshrine it into law. We are going to protect it.

My message to people when I am out talking to them in the local community – and I talk to thousands of people – is that we have your back. We are going to protect one of the fundamental education training systems here in Victoria. We are going to protect free TAFE. We are going to ensure that TAFE students are saving, on average, about \$3000 for their courses. This goes down so well. People love this, even if they are not enrolled in TAFE or thinking about doing TAFE themselves. I can talk to grandparents about it, and they can tell me that little Joey, when he graduates from school, is going to be doing a TAFE course and they are already looking into the free TAFE. It makes it a whole lot easier for busy working families to afford a great education, and it is a great opportunity to get skilled up to get a priority industry job. It is just such a good story.

In my electorate of Laverton we are fortunate enough to have a TAFE campus, just across the road from my boundary actually, at Victoria University’s Sunshine TAFE campus, which the member for St Albans and I have visited on many occasions. Their TAFE campus has a direct pathway to their centre of excellence in paramedicine.

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** That is right, member for Melton – training our hardworking ambos. There is nothing that makes a member of Parliament and a westie feel prouder than turning up to one of those graduations and also finding out that some of those paramedics are going to be in the western suburbs working hard, looking after westies. It is such a wonderful, miraculous moment. Free TAFE matters. Victoria is the birthplace of free TAFE. Our investment, our support and the backing of TAFE in this state is unparalleled. In fact it is such a game changer that the federal government have rolled it out nationwide. Victoria has led the way time and time again, and this is a game changer for busy people, working families, regardless of their age. This could not be in starker contrast to those opposite, who only cut and close TAFE here in Victoria. Labor has revived it. Labor will protect it.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (16:57): In the short time that I have it gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to this motion before the house. I would like to start my contribution by acknowledging the importance of TAFE and, in particular, GOTAFE in Shepparton. There is no doubt that free TAFE provides many students with the opportunity to study who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to do so. Since free TAFE was established back in 2019 more than 225,000 learners have taken up a free TAFE course. No-one should miss out on an opportunity for education and a career pathway. I would like to acknowledge all of my local and dedicated TAFE educators and staff, many of whom I am connected with. I have seen firsthand their incredible dedication and their commitment. I have a close friend Helen who is an early childhood educator at GOTAFE Shepparton, and I have seen firsthand how deeply she cares for her students and the support that she provides to her students. It goes beyond just the classroom. Michelle is another local educator who is deeply dedicated to her students, and it is educators like Helen and Michelle that we depend on to keep the courses running and students supported. But we must also listen to their feedback and the ways that they can be assisted and supported.

In a previous working life I was an educator for 20 years, and I know about the incredible opportunity we have to help others achieve their training goals. GOTAFE provides educational and career opportunities and is a critical education option in regional Victoria as there are many that wish to pursue their education and work opportunities close to home rather than having to relocate elsewhere, whether that be due to financial restraints or family or by choice. We must ensure that there are pathways for school leavers and mature students and, most importantly, a way forward that gives students choices and opportunities to succeed in life that suit them and meet their individual needs. We desperately need apprentices, tradies and a skilled workforce. We also depend on GOTAFE to provide ongoing training and support to local businesses and organisations to fill critical employment opportunities in trades and construction, agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality, health and childcare centres. The Goulburn Murray Trade Skills Centre in Shepparton helps meet demand for in-demand job skills like plumbing and construction. As I close in the last 10 seconds, I would also like to acknowledge the Youth Foyer, which supports students at GOTAFE. It provides housing and accommodation.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

**Assembly divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (24):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

*Noes (49):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Amendment defeated.**

**Motion agreed to.**

## Housing

### Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this house commends the Allan Labor government's housing strategy, including the Big Housing Build, housing targets for councils, planning and rental reforms and activity centre planning and recognises that improving affordability requires clear planning direction and building more homes where Victorians live, work and access transport.

### Assembly divided on motion:

*Ayes (48):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

### Motion agreed to.

## Bills

### Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

#### *Second reading*

### Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

### Motion agreed to.

### Read second time.

#### *Third reading*

### Motion agreed to.

### Read third time.

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

### Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

#### *Second reading*

### Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

### And David Southwick's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has allowed for proper consultation with the industry to occur.'

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Caulfield has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words that appear on the notice paper. The question is:

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

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

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (51):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

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

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (52):* Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (24):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**North East Link**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (17:16): (1629) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I am seeking is for her to address the ongoing concerns of residents in Kew and North Balwyn regarding the impacts of the North East Link construction. These issues are being experienced right across the electorate. Residents report impacts on amenity and livability, including dust, noise from construction works and changes to the local environment.

Residents have also raised concerns about the design and performance of noise walls. As I have previously raised in this place, residents are extremely disappointed by the changes that were made by this government to the noise walls along the North East Link Program, which differ from what was originally circulated by the government under the urban design and landscape plan. In the areas of North Balwyn that are in close proximity to the North East Link some residents report that upper sections of noise walls incorporate transparent or perspex-style panels allowing views through to the freeway. For many this is not consistent with their expectations of how these structures would protect the local amenity.

In other parts of the electorate, including Kellett and Barnard groves in Kew, residents have raised concerns about the removal of established trees and the treatment of existing noise walls. Residents in these streets report that a substantial number of trees at Jack O’Toole Reserve were cleared to facilitate construction works and that the extent of this removal was not adequately communicated to residents in advance of their removal. This has resulted in significant loss of greenery and changes to the character of the local environment. Residents have also flagged their concerns that existing noise walls are proposed to be retained and refurbished rather than upgraded. Locals are questioning whether this approach will provide an appropriate level of noise protection into the future.

More broadly, residents across the electorate have expressed concern about the cumulative impact of construction, particularly ongoing dust and noise, and what this means for their day-to-day lives. At its core this issue is about transparency. It is about engagement and ensuring that community expectations are properly understood, addressed and actually consulted on. Many residents have expressed concern about this consultation process with a view that information has been limited or provided too late for any action. I have raised these matters with the minister before, and residents have also made representations directly.

Noise walls and mitigation measures are not just infrastructure, they play an important role in protecting livability. They help shield homes, backyards and parklands from the impact of major roads. Residents are seeking clear information, appropriate mitigation measures and confidence that the long-term amenity of their neighbourhoods will be protected through this construction phase. The community is not asking for the project to stop. They are asking for their amenity to be respected, their concerns to be taken seriously and for their voices to be actually heard by this government, and they deserve nothing less.

**Hampton Park shopping centre**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (17:19): (1630) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment and concerns the upgrades announced for the Hampton Park retail precinct as part of the multicultural business precinct revitalisation program. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on these upgrades that will benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

I was really pleased to hear that the Hampton Park retail precinct was awarded \$250,000 under the state Labor government's multicultural business precinct revitalisation program and that the grant would be supported by the City of Casey as well to help deliver improvements to this much-loved and very busy shopping hub. Hampton Park shopping centre is home to many wonderful food shops, small businesses and cafes as well as a supermarket. There is lots to love about this local shopping centre, including all the various regulars, the local Salvos store, the bustling fresh fruit shops and various multicultural eateries, from Sri Lankan, Afghan and Vietnamese cuisine to Cambodian, Lebanese, Japanese, Thai and your classic bakery, and who could forget Jason's fish and chip shop as well. It is all available within this precinct, thanks to the fantastic smaller family-run businesses and traders. The vibrant mix of cuisines represents the diversity of our multicultural community in the electorate of Narre Warren South. About 56 per cent of all small businesses are owned by people with at least one parent born overseas, and this program is a part of this government's commitment to supporting our multicultural communities while also boosting local economies and jobs as well. I think that this revitalisation grant is an exciting opportunity for our community. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with them.

### **Gippsland East electorate public transport**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (17:21): (1631) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to guarantee train and bus services that will cater for the numbers of passengers in my region. A minimum of six carriages is required on the Bairnsdale V/Line service simply to meet the need. Given the minister has refused my repeated requests for additional bus services to link with the trains at Traralgon and then provide additional services to the region, she should at least provide the right number of carriages on our train sets. Last week I received an email from Hannah – it might have been the week before, actually – who advised that the 6:14 am train that left Bairnsdale for Melbourne had only three carriages, not six. I note that they come in sets of three; you either get three or six. We had 100 people standing the whole way to Melbourne from Bairnsdale – 4 hours on the train, standing the whole way. This left the conductor very stressed, and in fact when the train got closer to Traralgon the conductor suggested some people get off the train and catch a later service from Traralgon to Melbourne. That is not good enough.

It also extends beyond trains. That same week we had three TAFE students, aged 16 and 17, who rely on public transport who could not get on the bus at Johnsonville to get to their education. This is their education, and at times they have had to sit on the floor or stand, but the bus was just simply so full that they could not get on. The scenario that we have, with the announcement of free public transport, is going to exacerbate these overcrowding problems unless we get the rolling stock or we get the bus services to cater for the additional need. When an announcement like that is made, we have already got that problem where the trains are overcrowded and people cannot get on the buses. You cannot make that announcement without providing the additional carriage services to cater for the people. So I ask the minister to please ensure that she caters for the people on our V/Line services and our transport services by ensuring each train has six carriages – the two sets of three – and our bus services are able to cater for the need.

### **Point Cook police station**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (17:23): (1632) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me at the Point Cook police station, which is under construction right now. We know we have more to do in terms of community safety, and we will keep turning up as a Labor government to do that. Part of that is building the police station at Point Cook, and that has solar panels now on the roof, the walls are up, and I look forward to seeing if the interiors are already underway. This is in addition to the commitment that we have made to the Werribee police station, the largest police station outside of the CBD, as well as the wonderful justice centre – 13 law courts down in East Werribee – again, the largest law courts facility outside the CBD. We have changed the laws in this state, and we will keep coming back to them if we need to. We have

already seen remand up by a significant amount. I look forward to the minister coming and joining me in Point Cook and seeing the progress of the police station.

### **Malvern electorate police resources**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (17:25): (1633) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Police. The action I seek is for the minister to increase resources to Victoria Police so as to enable the reopening of the Malvern police station 24 hours a day and the maintenance of protective services officers on every train station in the Malvern electorate. It was a bit over two years ago that the member for Bendigo East took over as Premier, so when I tell the house about what has happened to crime in my community during that time, it is on the Premier. The Premier has made the decisions, and she is accountable for what has occurred. The first point to note is that just two months after the Premier was sworn into that role, in late 2023, we started to see police station operating hours being rolled back at 43 stations across Victoria. Malvern police station used to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our local police station being open all the time gave a great sense of comfort to my community, but under this Premier Malvern police station is now closed at least 16 hours a day. It only opens from 10 am to 6 pm, which is great if criminals only work during business hours, but they do not. Malvern residents no longer have a safe haven where they can go in the middle of the night if they are scared, if they are fleeing family violence or if they are being followed on the road.

Let us examine what has happened to crime in my area since Labor closed the Malvern police station 16 hours a day. We have seen aggravated burglaries in the Malvern electorate skyrocket by 94.5 per cent between 2023 and 2025. The independent Crime Statistics Agency reported 110 aggravated burglaries in Malvern in 2023 and 214 of them in 2025. When you cut police, you increase crime – it is that simple. For the Armadale postcode agg burgs went from six to 28, Malvern postcode saw a doubling from 25 to 50, Malvern East went from 39 agg burgs in 2023 to 88 in 2025 – a 125 per cent increase. It is not just aggravated burglaries on the rise. Theft of motor vehicles has increased by 112 per cent in my electorate in the two years since the Premier was appointed and the Malvern police station closed 16 hours a day.

To add insult to injury, the Allan Labor government is stripping the protective services officers from the train stations in my community. We have 11 stations in my area across two train lines. We need PSOs patrolling these stations at night to keep commuters safe, but Labor would rather take away the PSOs from my community to fill holes caused by the 1500 vacancies in Victoria Police. Well, my constituents are sick of paying for Labor's poor economic management, bad decisions and crime crisis. It is time this government got its priorities right. That means properly resourcing police, that means reopening Malvern police station 24/7 and that means hands off the PSOs on our local train stations.

### **Blackburn activity centre**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (17:28): (1634) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action that I seek is for the minister to take on board the feedback from the Blackburn community and Whitehorse council in relation to the Blackburn activity centre, which has been received during the phase 2 consultation period, and to incorporate this feedback into the final plans. I would first like to acknowledge and thank the minister for listening to the concerns of the Blackburn community in relation to the significant landscape overlay areas. The exclusion of these overlays from the activity centre catchment is a recognition of the strong environmental attributes of this area and the importance of their retention as our city grows.

During the five-week consultation period of phase 2, many Blackburn residents have shared with me their views about the activity centre plans. Most people that I have spoken to in Blackburn recognise and support the need for additional housing in their suburb. They do not buy into the scare campaigns run by the opposition that those Victorians looking for their first home should be locked out of suburbs such as Blackburn and forced to live either in the inner city or on the periphery of Melbourne. However, residents have expressed a desire to see a more achievable and moderate-density outcome across the activity centre than that presented in the draft plans, with future building heights that are

proportionate and responsive to the local context. Blackburn is not a major commercial centre like Box Hill or Ringwood. It lacks a major employment anchor and does not even have a supermarket within the activity centre boundaries. Accordingly, it retains a village feel, and it is important that any new developments add to, rather than supplant, the qualities that attract people to live in Blackburn in the first place. I look forward to the minister's response.

### Electric bikes

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (17:29): (1635) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is that the state government offer subsidies or rebates for people to buy or rent an e-bike, as well as other measures that would promote commuting by bike during this period of fuel insecurity. Right now anything we can do that leads people to reduce the use of cars will save fuel for the people and the industries that really need it. That is why it has made sense for the government to take up the Greens' suggestion to make public transport free. Train station car parks are already filling earlier in the morning, as more people are driving to the station. Outer suburban stations are more sparse than those closer to the city, and they generate their own road traffic. E-bikes offer an alternative to commuters needing to travel 5 or 10 kilometres to a station or directly to work. E-bikes put more destinations within range for people who ride, not just athletes, and they make riding a more realistic option for those currently deterred from riding by hills, wind or the need to change their clothes when they get there. Subsidy schemes for e-bikes have operated successfully in Tasmania and Queensland and could also include non-electric bikes.

There are other measures the government should consider to promote cycling as a mode of transport during this fuel crisis, including fast-tracking the introduction of 30-kilometre-per-hour speed limits in residential streets and high-activity areas to make it safer for people to walk and ride and adding bike racks to buses on regional bus routes and pop-up bike lanes that separate riders from car traffic. Separated bike lanes make riding safer and attract travellers who are deterred by fear of close encounters with cars. Monash University research revealed that over 60 per cent of women would ride more often if they felt safer, and they particularly pointed to a lack of separated bike lanes. Pop-up lanes can be installed along strategic routes, and those that connect people with public transport should be prioritised. Infrastructure Victoria's recent report showed that separated bike lanes are a good long-term investment, and there is no better time to start than when we desperately need them.

So much can be done to attract people to public transport, including making it free, improving it or offering it in the many suburbs without it, but we should also think about how people get to stations or bus stops that are a bit too far away to walk. A lot of fuel is used for very short trips, and we have an alternative. I urge the minister for active transport to make active transport more attractive for those who can use it during this fuel crisis.

### Food relief

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (17:32): (1636) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, and the action I seek is for the minister to attend a local forum bringing together food rescue and food relief organisations with major supermarkets or their local representatives to discuss how we can better manage food waste, support those in need and ensure the sustainability of our food relief organisations' volunteer workforce. I am particularly pleased to be making this request to the minister on a day when the Premier announced \$2.7 million for food relief, including for a number of the organisations that work with us locally.

In the Preston and Reservoir areas we are fortunate to have a number of such organisations, notably our local neighbourhood houses and also DIVRS, where Chloe coordinates the collections. They work alongside food rescue partners, including SecondBite, who was one of the recipients of the additional funding this morning. I would like to give a shout-out to Akbar there, who does great work coordinating local services. We also work with Food Connect Crew Incorporated – a shout-out there to Mala, Britt, Michelle, Daisy and Lena – and with NEFRI and Bread Hub, where Terry Brooks and Kevin Noonan do great work. All of those organisations distribute surplus food from a variety of

places, including major supermarkets like Woolworths and Coles. I would like to recognise the efforts and contributions of Marino, Dom and Raymond at Woolworths, Northland, who are busy ensuring that food that would otherwise go to waste reaches those who need it.

All those partnerships are vital and do wonderful work, but they are also under strain. Demand for food relief keeps rising, which is why we were so glad to hear the Premier's announcement this morning. While more food is being recovered than ever, the pressure on the volunteers who make the system work is intensifying. I know that one of the organisations that delivers to Reservoir Neighbourhood House had a point last year when their three main driver distributors were all simultaneously dealing with some health issues and physical injuries and were restricted in their ability to collect and distribute. I note that a lot of those volunteers actually self-fund their fuel as well, which you will appreciate at the present moment is additionally difficult. They give up their weekends and evenings to prevent waste and ensure people in our community have access to fresh fruit, vegetables and bread. That is why I am suggesting this particular local forum in which we can consider how as a government we support these volunteers and their organisations to work meaningfully and sustainably with supermarkets such as Coles, Woolworths and Aldi. A local forum bringing these organisations and these supermarkets together would be a valuable step forward. If we get the right people at the table, we could support our volunteers, reduce waste and strengthen food security across Victoria. I hope the minister can consider this adjournment request. I would like to particularly thank Louise Kenney-Shen in our office, who does some fantastic work with the organisations that I have mentioned tonight.

### U3A Hawthorn

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (17:35): (1637) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Ageing. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with me and members of U3A Hawthorn to explore opportunities to strengthen their funding and support and to work with local councils, including the City of Boroondara, to promote active ageing. Established in 1984, U3A Hawthorn is one of many vibrant University of the Third Age organisations across Victoria. It is a powerful example of community-driven education at its best. Built on the simple but powerful idea that learning is lifelong, it offers a wide range of courses from language classes and literacy groups to science lectures, art workshops, music technology skills alongside social and physical activities such as yoga and walking. Importantly, it is peer-led, a model which works very well where members both teach and learn, sharing their skills, knowledge and life experience.

Last week I spoke at U3A Hawthorn in a question-and-answer session with the politics and current affairs group of approximately 100 members. We covered a wide range of topics, including recent elections, the style and tone of politics, energy, and the cost of living and planning. One of the great features of U3A Hawthorn is that it is apolitical but in a way which encourages and supports spirited debate and lively discussion. Participants are role models demonstrating how we can all engage with one another robustly and courteously at the same time. It is a real credit to the tradition that U3A Hawthorn members have fostered over many years. I would like to acknowledge each and every one of the participants whose engagement and contribution cannot be overstated.

My thanks for being invited go to David Sharland and Elizabeth Jeffrey. More broadly, I wish to commend all of U3A Hawthorn's volunteers and members for their continued contribution to our community. It was good to catch up too with Pennie Kendall. To president Stephanie Sowerby and the board of management Judy Park, Peter Rapinet, Ellen Stoddart, Carol Lancashire, Gary Adler, Julie Angus-Kiddle, David Bennett, Ron Copperwaite, Stewart Doig, Denise Soutar and Sue Waller, thank you for giving your time, energy and expertise to ensure U3A Hawthorn continues to thrive. U3A groups are powered by volunteers, modest membership fees and access to shared community spaces. As demand increases, there is a real opportunity to ensure these organisations are well supported to expand their reach and continue delivering for their communities. At a time when social isolation is an increasing concern, particularly amongst seniors, U3A Hawthorn provides something invaluable. I hope the Minister for Ageing can accommodate my request tonight.

**Broadmeadows electorate Christian community**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (17:38): (1638) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I seek is to be provided with an update on how we can best support and celebrate our wonderful Christian community. The Broadmeadows electorate is home to lots of churches and Christian communities, many who generously give their time to help others in a huge variety of ways, including through food relief, and I was really pleased with our increase in funding to food relief today. St Mark's in Fawkner runs the Hope Cafe, giving people doing it tough the dignity of a three-course meal every Thursday night. I occasionally get to help them out, but I take this opportunity to sincerely thank those that turn up week after week to generously give their time to serve, including Krystene, Luch, Dylan, Anagie, Stella, Marianne, Sandra, Maria, Mary, Luke, Phil, Virginia, John, Jacinta, Kellie, Joe, Clare, Annie, Maggie, Steph, Lauren, Meri, Chantelle and Vivianne, as well as those who come together to put the food hampers together during the day and cook the absolutely delicious meals. We also have Orange Sky come along, who help do laundry, and that is really great for the people who come along as well. Everyone there is always looking for new volunteers if anyone is interested.

I also just want to acknowledge that Easter is the most significant time in the Christian calendar – a time to reflect on sacrifice and new beginnings, to come together and celebrate the shared values of kindness, giving and unconditional love. I take this opportunity to wish everyone a very happy Easter on Sunday, filled with love, joy and togetherness. Buona Pasqua to the Italian community and a very happy Easter to our Orthodox community for next Sunday. I hope everyone has a safe and happy long weekend.

**Responses**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (17:39): The member for Kew had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure concerning concerns expressed by her constituents regarding North East Link works. The member for Narre Warren South had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Small Business and Employment, and he is seeking that the minister join him to inspect the upgrades that are happening at Hampton Park shopping centre. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Active and Public Transport. The action he is seeking is better services, both train and bus, for his community, his constituents. The member for Point Cook had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police.

The action he seeks is that the minister join him to see the works that are underway on building a brand new police station at Point Cook. The member for Malvern had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action that he seeks is that there are increased resources to Victoria Police. The member for Box Hill had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action he seeks is that the minister take into consideration community views and concerns, specifically his community of Blackburn. The member for Brunswick had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and he is seeking subsidies and other supports to promote the use of e-bikes and other types of cycling.

The member for Preston had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, and the action he seeks is that the minister attend a local forum with the many community organisations in his electorate that are committed to the delivery of food relief. The member for Hawthorn had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Ageing, and the action that he seeks is that the minister take time out to meet with U3A and to discuss with them the many ways in which they assist, or to learn from them about the ways in which they promote, active ageing. The member for Broadmeadows has a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action that she is seeking is that our Premier update her on the support that is being provided by our government to Christian communities, which seems like a very good time to join the member for Broadmeadows in wishing everyone a safe and peaceful Easter break, particularly our Parliament staff.

## ADJOURNMENT

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Legislative Assembly

Thursday 2 April 2026

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**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** As we are entering a break for Easter, I would like to, as always, thank our clerks, our attendants and all of our parliamentary staff, especially our catering staff, who keep us caffeinated so this place works, and a special shout-out to Eleanor, the attendant whose birthday it is today, so say happy birthday to Eleanor as you are walking out of the room. On that note, I wish everyone a happy Easter, happy Passover, and we will see you all in May.

**House adjourned 5:43 pm.**