



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 14 May 2025**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 14 May 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Petitions*

**Barry Beach marine terminal**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 3593 signatures:

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

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government and the Minister for Planning to commission an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) into Esso Australia's plans for the decommissioning of retired oil and gas rigs at Barry Beach Marine Terminal and ensure that the EES involves a period of public consultation, recognising that any decommissioning activity undertaken in Victoria must reflect international best practice. Please return to 312 Smith Street, Collingwood VIC 3066 by April 30 2025. Any questions email: [stanley.woodhouse@foe.org.au](mailto:stanley.woodhouse@foe.org.au)**

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

*Papers*

**Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General –

Domestic Building Insurance, May 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Quality of Victoria's Critical Data Assets, May 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Bendigo Kangan Institute – Report, 2024.

Box Hill Institute – Report, 2024.

Chisholm Institute – Report, 2024.

Gordon Institute of TAFE (The Gordon) – Report, 2024.

Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) – Report, 2024.

Holmesglen Institute – Report, 2024.

Melbourne Polytechnic – Report, 2024.

South West Institute of TAFE – Report, 2024.

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (SuniTAFE) – Report, 2024.

TAFE Gippsland – Report, 2024.

William Angliss Institute of TAFE – Report, 2024.

Wodonga Institute of TAFE – Report, 2024.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.***Motions***Middle East conflict**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the humanitarian disaster in Gaza is deepening in catastrophe, with children dying from starvation, bombing and preventable causes at alarming rates;
- (b) since January 2025 more than 9000 children have been admitted for treatment of acute malnutrition, with thousands more unable to access life-saving care due to ongoing insecurity and mass displacement;
- (c) the State of Israel continues to block the entry of essential humanitarian aid and supplies into the Gaza Strip since 2 March 2025, depriving more than a million children of life-saving aid;
- (d) since 7 October 2023 direct attacks have hit over 400 schools in Gaza, and the UN satellite service reports that 95.4 per cent of schools have suffered damage;
- (e) children in Palestine are suffering with the trauma of war and ongoing psychological distress;
- (2) acknowledges that over half of Gaza's population are children and that the deliberate denial of food, water and medical aid constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law;
- (3) reiterates that as a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Australia has obligations to actively uphold the protection of children in conflict;
- (4) affirms that the safety, dignity and rights of all children, including Palestinian children, must be upheld and protected without exception;
- (5) recognises that Palestinians are at an extreme and imminent risk of mass ethnic cleansing;
- (6) does not support the State of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza; and
- (7) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

**Leave refused.***Members statements***Federal election**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:46): I rise to celebrate the Australian Labor Party's historic win at the 2025 federal election, a victory that reaffirms the public trust in Labor's vision for fairness, aspiration and opportunity for all. One of the most extraordinary results was the success of Sarah Witty in the seat of Melbourne. Sarah's community-led campaign was grounded in compassion, inclusion and practical action. It struck a deep chord with voters, resulting in a truly momentous win over Adam Bandt and the Greens. This victory did not happen by chance. It was built by the hard work of Labor branches across the inner city – volunteers who knocked doors, staffed street stalls, made thousands of phone calls and never gave up on the idea that Melbourne deserves strong Labor representation that advocates for their most beloved community. Their commitment and energy was nothing short of inspiring. I was proud to join Sarah at several events during the campaign, including a community lunch at Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House. We also connected with residents at the Wellington, a grassroots not-for-profit supporting tower residents with food security and health services. Sarah Witty will be a powerful voice in Canberra, shaped by lived experience, driven by compassion and backed by a movement of hope and hard work. Congratulations, Sarah and Melbourne.



**Federal election**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (09:47): I rise to congratulate my federal Nationals colleagues for the resounding vote of confidence they received in the recent federal election. The Nationals vote remained strong right across northern Victoria. Andrew Lethlean achieved a massive swing of 10 per cent in a once-safe Labor seat, and the results were so close it took seven days to count. Andrew ran a very positive issues-focused campaign and is highly regarded in the Bendigo community. The support of his family, friends, local business owners and residents was absolutely amazing. His signs were all over the place. Congratulations also to my federal colleagues Dr Anne Webster and Sam Birrell. Both retained their seats with an increased margin. I also want to acknowledge David Littleproud and Senator Bridget McKenzie for their strong support. It is an honour to work alongside such a dedicated federal team to serve the people of rural and regional Victoria, from regional cities to the most remote parts of our state.

**Southside Justice**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:49): Even though sex work was decriminalised in Victoria in 2022, we know that laws do not change stigma overnight. Sex workers still face workplace discrimination, being denied even basic protections that accompany most other employees. They still face police harassment, with regular reports of being unfairly targeted by authorities. They still face housing instability, with landlords still evicting sex workers for working from home, even when it is fully legal. And they still face financial discrimination, such as rejection from banks when they disclose their income source, despite following all legal obligations like any other worker. This is why it is vital that sex workers have access to legal support services. Thankfully the sex worker legal program run by Southside Justice provides free, confidential legal help to sex workers across Victoria. It is a critical lifeline for people who are often excluded, judged or overlooked by mainstream services. We know the decriminalising of sex work in Victoria cannot be implemented successfully without the relevant investment alongside it. If the Victorian government is serious about honouring this commitment to safe decriminalisation, funding sex work advocacy and legal support like the service provided by Southside Justice is fundamental. I call on them to do just that ahead of the 20 May budget.

**March of the Living**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:50): During April, as part of a delegation of Victorian MPs, I visited Poland for the March of the Living, an annual event that retraces the death marches from the Auschwitz I to the Auschwitz II-Birkenau extermination camp, where a million Jews and others were murdered during World War II. The march serves as a tribute to all victims of the Holocaust, their memories, their legacies and the legacies lost. It was emotional. It was striking, harrowing, seeing the systemic brutality, the clinical organisation and the industrial scale of death. It will stay with me for the rest of my life. As parliamentarians it was important to bear witness to the lessons of the Holocaust firsthand and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to confronting hatred and prejudice in all of its forms. I want to thank Sue Hampel, co-president of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, for her invaluable knowledge and guidance during the tour, along with Gary Samowitz from March of the Living and the members for Box Hill and Caulfield for coordinating. We learned in history that hate began with words, but it ended in places like Auschwitz. As the sun set on that day, it rose in Melbourne on Anzac Day, where neo-Nazis tried to disrupt the dawn service at the shrine, booing the welcome to country and other speakers. It was a despicable act of hate that, without question, we must all lend our voice to condemn – and without hesitation. Fascists are attempting to sow division in Melbourne using whatever opportunity they have. Today they might start booing a welcome to country, but that is not where it ends; it never does. We must stop fascism wherever it rears its ugly head.

**Cannabis law reform**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:52): Imagine my delight reading the *Herald Sun* on Monday when my eyes fell on this ripper headline: ‘Victorians back push for legal weed,

Penington Institute research shows'. The article then went on to say that a Melbourne-based public health research and drug policy institute has made some surprise findings in its survey of 3000 people. Not that the findings are in fact terribly surprising; they mirror those of the more recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare household drug survey, which showed that 80 per cent of Australians support decriminalisation and 54 per cent support full legalisation. Legalisation is not the same as decriminalisation, and we do not want to confuse the two. Legalisation would establish a commercial cannabis market, and we are not seeking this at this point in time. We just want the government to stop arresting thousands of people every year for possessing a little bit of cannabis. We seek a model similar to the successful ACT decriminalisation model, a model fully supported during the recent inquiry into the regulation of personal adult use of cannabis. Indeed the first recommendation of that inquiry supported by the committee was that the Victorian government implement a model similar to the one operating in the ACT, a recommendation enthusiastically endorsed by public health advocates and the legal community in Victoria. So what are we waiting for?

### **Parliamentary officers enterprise bargaining agreement**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): I rise to acknowledge and celebrate the important work of the Community and Public Sector Union, State Public Service Federation Victoria Branch, a strong and proud union standing up for working people across our state. As a former union official, I understand the vital role that unions play in protecting the rights and conditions of our workers. Most recently the CPSU successfully negotiated a new parliamentary officers single enterprise agreement with the Department of Parliamentary Services. This agreement delivers a \$5600 cost-of-living payment, a 3 per cent pay rise backdated to 1 May 2024, a 1.25 per cent annual mobility payment, 2 per cent progressions and 1.5 per cent top-of-grade payments. It is no surprise that 97 per cent of parliamentary officers voted in favour of this agreement. Every member in this place knows that our parliamentary officers are the backbone of this place. They uphold our procedures in the chamber, they manage our live streams and produce the official record – from the library and committee staff that support our inquiry work to the dedicated individuals who maintain our electorate offices and ensure the security of this precinct. I commend the CPSU for their advocacy and encourage all parliamentary officers to join the union to safeguard their rights and build better conditions through collective action. With the electorate officer enterprise agreement also due for renewal, I similarly urge electorate officers to reach out to the CPSU and get involved.

### **Gendered violence**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:54): Stop killing our women: this was the clear and heartbreakingly familiar message at the What Were You Wearing rally in Naarm on Saturday. I marched alongside hundreds of women, exhausted and outraged that we are still having to attend rallies and vigils to find ways to stop the killing of women and children at the hands of violent perpetrators. Since January of this year 25 women have had their lives cut short. That number rises to 128 since January of last year. These numbers go beyond private tragedies; they are political failures. Frontline services are already stretched thin. Underfunding and mainstream models leave so many women without meaningful access to help. The voices that are often sidelined are the ones that are disproportionately impacted: multicultural women, First Nations women, transgender women and women with disabilities. These groups should be at the centre of decision-making, not token representatives. The rally urged six clear actions of the government: (1) invest in primary prevention, (2) guarantee secure housing, (3) mandate trauma-informed training for first responders, (4) reform bail laws to prioritise survivors, (5) adopt consistent, holistic consent laws and (6) boost funding for crisis support services. Further to this, we intensify our calls for the urgent need for culturally specific refuge. To protect the next generation we need bipartisan commitment. We need to stop tinkering around the edges on this epidemic while the violence continues.

### Federal election

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:56): I rise to celebrate the federal election result and the benefits it will bring to residents right across eastern Victoria, whether it is the investments in Medicare and access to free bulk-billing, the cheaper medicines on the PBS, the more nurses and doctors we are going to see trained in our communities, the fully funded education, the investing in road infrastructure or a clear plan on energy and lowering power bills, including home batteries – and all this with clear policies to increase wages and jobs. I want to acknowledge the incredible local Labor candidates that went out and met community where they are and talked to locals about this positive plan that was put forward, and they are Naomi Oakley in Casey, Jeff Springfield in La Trobe, Sonny Stephens in Gippsland, Tully Fletcher in Monash and Sarah Race in Flinders. I think it was really evident that when you meet community where they are, when you approach community with a clear set of values that informs policies and when you bring a positive plan that is going to improve locals' quality of life, improve livability and improve affordability, you see the result of that. I think it was in absolute contrast to and a rejection of the divisive, negative and quite frankly lazy politics that we saw from the Liberals and the Nationals.

### *Production of documents*

#### Department of Treasury and Finance

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all briefings provided by the Department of Treasury and Finance to the Treasurer, including formal briefings, advisory documents, background information documents from the date the Treasurer, the Honourable Jaclyn Symes MLC, was sworn into the role of Treasurer to 7 March 2025.

Why is this important? It is important because this was a great opportunity to take stock of where we are financially as a state. There will be important briefings that really do set the scene. You have an incoming Treasurer. It was important for that Treasurer to be briefed and have the scene set and take stock of where we are, but it is also important really as a matter of transparency. This is not an unusual motion in that sense. These documents should be readily available to the chamber.

There is a perception in the community that this government is reckless with our finances, and I think the figures demonstrate that pretty clearly. The business sector in particular want to know that their interests and their ability to thrive in our community are going to be protected and in fact helped to flourish. There is a fear that we may be trying to tax our way into prosperity or trying to borrow our way out of debt. So having clarity around these things is good for the community.

It is also good in another sense for society: it is good as an education to the community of what the mechanics are of this state's finances. We all have a very vested interest in the mechanics of how we are going to get our way out of this debt. The community should understand, when choices are being made, what the mechanics of those choices are, because these have material impacts on people's lives. The Treasury department is not just the government's department, it is the state's department, and the community are entitled to know what advice, what counselling and what briefings they are giving so that we know on what basis they are made.

There are some pretty important things to be educated about – for instance, debt management. We have got approximately \$30 billion of debt to be raised or rolled over every year for the next 10 years – about \$120 billion in debt to be re-raised. A lot of that debt, when it first came out as Treasury bonds, was loaned out at low interest rates – around 3 per cent or in that range. Now 10-year Treasury bonds are at over 5 per cent, so the refinancing of debt is not trivial in the least. In fact as we refinance that debt there is going to be significantly greater interest burden on the state. The advice that we received around debt management is going to be of particular interest because we are in a state that has been warned more than once that our credit rating is in jeopardy. If our credit rating goes down, those

interest rates on our bonds go up, and we have got an earth-shattering amount of debt to refinance. So the balance between what we have in the forward estimates for debt, what projects we are doing, what cuts we are going to make – and there will be cuts – how that advice has come through and how those judgements have been reached, is incredibly important to the community.

Over the last 10 years there also has been – and the Treasurer herself has acknowledged this – this creeping exercise in using Treasurer’s advances to paper over shortcomings in planning and execution within government departments. The Treasurer herself has confirmed that this is not a good trend. The Victorian Auditor-General’s Office has confirmed that this is not a good trend and has raised concerns around this also. The concerns are because the need for a Treasurer’s advance, particularly once it has become habitual budget to budget or between budgets, means that there is a systemic problem within government department planning, within government policy, that you are not following the budgetary process appropriately, that there is a breakdown in there somehow that would mean you are going to need these advances habitually. The Treasurer herself has said that she will be looking deeply at Treasurer’s advances. In looking at them there will have to be a diagnosis of why that has happened – why there have been more Treasurer’s advances. It would be very informative for the chamber and for the community to understand why they are occurring, how they are going to be addressed and how you are going to improve the budgetary process, which is in the interests of all.

This is also in the government’s interest; it is clearly in the government’s interest that we have these documents, because of course there are going to be cuts. There are going to be cuts, we would presume, to health, to roads, to schools. There will be departmental amalgamations. There will be drives to, on paper, achieve efficiency. So explaining those cuts to the community, why they have been justified through the Treasury briefings and what the judgements have been in terms of this cut versus that cut, this borrowing versus that cut et cetera, is all going to be very educationally useful. I support this motion. It is a very sensible; it is a matter of transparency. We should have these documents.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I rise to make a contribution on this motion 922 standing in Mr Davis’s name. Might I say, I note that Mr Davis did not even hang around to talk to this motion – he left the chamber – and I notice that there are a very scant number of Liberals actually sitting on the opposition benches. Unfortunately, it was chucked to Mr Welch – a hospital pass to Mr Welch – at the last minute to stand up and try and get this ridiculous motion over the line.

As is our practice, we do not oppose documents motions. It is our practice in this chamber; we are quite happy to not oppose them. But the bottom line is that this motion is again a frivolous waste of this chamber’s time, because Mr Newbury, the Shadow Treasurer in the other place, has already sought an FOI application for these sorts of documents. Again, it is a frivolous waste of this time; it is wasting precious government resources and parliamentary resources to make public servants go through truckloads of documents. It is a fishing expedition.

I might just talk about what is actually in the motion too, because this is what is being sought. It says, pursuant to standing order 10.01:

... to table in the Council within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all briefings provided by the Department of Treasury and Finance to the Treasurer ...

on what?

including formal briefings, advisory documents, background information ...

If that is not a fishing expedition, I do not know what is, because you have not even articulated exactly what it is. So let us get truckloads of paper; let us have a billion boxes for some poor public servant to go through and figure out what is relevant and what is not. You cannot even get a motion right in the house to call for documents and information to be tabled, and that just proves that this is nothing more than a frivolous waste of time. It is a joke. Is this the best that Mr Davis can come up with? He had five weeks to come up with something a lot better than this, and the bottom line is this is a really

pathetic attempt at trying again to say, 'Look, the government's bad; they're trying to hide things,' all the rest of it.

I note Mr Welch's contribution was all about government debt, government this, government that. But the bottom line is, Mr Welch, I do not know what your proposals are, because again you come in and you attack the government but I do not hear any skerrick of information about what you propose, about what you might do, because we know what the Liberals will do: if you ever got into government, you would cut, cut, cut, cut. You would cut everything. You would start with public education, and you would also then go to public health, because you hate the public. You hate public servants. Let us talk about what Peter Dutton went to the election with: 'Let's cut. Let's do a department of government efficiency and cut the public service. Let's get rid of all diversity, equity and inclusion.' I mean, it is just the playbook – the worst examples.

You are bereft of ideas over there. You have had to copy from America, and you got resoundingly rejected. Let us talk about the election result. How many kombi vans, please? Can somebody order a kombi van for the Victorian Liberal Party? Because that is what you need to pull up. How many seats are there? Five, I think, in Victoria; that is it.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Six? You are being generous, Mr Galea. But anyway, we need a kombi van to come along and pick you all up, because your politics – your nasty, divisive politics – were resoundingly rejected by the Victorian public. I go back to my earlier comments: I am yet to hear one idea or one suggestion from those opposite – oh, Mr Davis, welcome back. Again, it is your motion. You did not even have the confidence to sit here and listen to the contributions of the government on this matter. Again, I might add for the record – and I have said this before – every time I get up and talk about –

**David Davis:** President, I have come back into the chamber to seek a point of order on this matter because the member has strayed way, way off from a simple documents motion. She was talking about Peter Dutton before. I will just point out clearly that it has got nothing at all to do with the federal government or the federal opposition. She has strayed from what is a narrow documents motion.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Further to the point of order, President, Mr Davis was not in the chamber, so he did not actually hear the context of what I was talking about. The point was I was referring to the lack of ideas from those opposite in regard to this motion and drawing an analogy with his federal colleagues, so it is entirely relevant to the motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Terpstra, being the first speaker of the government side, has some latitude.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I have a minute or so left on the clock, but I am yet to hear what those opposite and what Mr Davis might propose that the Victorian public might actually be interested in. As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted by a frivolous point of order yet again, the cuts that would come under the Liberal Party if they were ever in government – you would start with public education, because, again, you hate the public. Let us be honest here. You are all about small government; you are transparent about that. Every time I hear you guys talk publicly about anything, you say, 'We're about small government. We're the party of small business.' So what you do is you cut government services so that your rich mates can go and profit from them – it is absolutely transparent. Oh, and let us talk about small business. You were so bereft of ideas that when your federal colleagues decided to tell the women of Australia to go back to work, you forgot that they were also supporting the small businesses of Australia and you got resoundingly thumped for it, because all those small business operators who are struggling out there –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the member has just strayed far, far beyond her purview.

**The PRESIDENT:** The member's time has expired.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:10): I rise to contribute to this debate. Documents motions are an important tool of this Parliament to scrutinise decisions of government to hold governments accountable. Normally, in principle, I am very supportive of documents motions as a way of scrutinising government decision-making, but to be quite frank, given the way the Liberal Party has continuously sought to question and to criticise the new Treasurer in a way that often extends I think far beyond her role in this government, it is impossible for me not to see this motion through a thick veil of misogyny.

I look forward to genuinely scrutinising decisions of this government and of this Treasurer through the budget estimates process and throughout this term of Parliament. I reckon there are going to be a lot of things that we disagree on – let us have that debate. However, instead this Liberal motion seems to me to be an attempt to weaponise processes of Parliament to further their sexist lines of questioning and personal attacks on this Treasurer. If the opposition want to talk about scrutinising government budget decisions, then I will remind them they had that opportunity recently in this Parliament through Greens amendments to ensure that our Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is chaired by someone not from the government themselves, and they voted against it – so there is that. To engage in this way makes a mockery of this important tool that we have established in the Parliament to request and retrieve documents. But I think given the huge scope of what is being requested in this motion, particularly between the Treasurer and her own department, my guess is that this is solely an attempt to further sling mud, an attempt to bring into question the personal competence of the first female Treasurer, prior to her even having the opportunity to deliver her first budget. The gendered nature of this is impossible to miss, and it must be called out. That is what I am doing today.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:12): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion that was moved this morning by Mr Welch in his absence. In a point of order Mr Davis referred to this as a 'narrow' motion. Of all the very wideranging motions that we have had in this place, I would say this is perhaps the most wideranging of them all. It is not some narrow motion seeking one or two documents; it is seeking everything that has been briefed to the Treasurer from the Department of Treasury and Finance since she was Treasurer. That is the opposite of narrow, Mr Davis. That is perhaps the most wideranging motion you could say. Indeed as the Treasurer interjected before, why not just live stream her office if that is the sort of information that you are seeking.

It is part of a pattern that we have seen from those opposite, in particular Mr Davis, seeking to undermine and trash at every opportunity the important concept of executive privilege, that being that advice to ministers and advice as part of cabinet processes are confidential, and they are confidential for good reasons – so that those public servants can provide frank and fearless advice. It is an important part of our Westminster system of government. It has been an accepted part since – I forget the exact year – a point in the 19th century in fact, in which the Victorian constitution makes reference to the standing orders at the time of the House of Commons. And just in relation to matters of privilege –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: What was it, 1856? Thank you. You may have been witness to it when it was brought over here, Mr Davis – no, you were not. The privileges – which were then termed Crown privilege, which we now know as executive privilege – are an important part of the Westminster system. Despite your many and varied attacks, this may just be the most extraordinary of them all, Mr Davis, seeking everything that was briefed to a minister. You know that that is an unreasonable request. You know that it is unreasonable, with such a short window for a response as well, to expect public servants to be able to fulfil that request. The truth is we know that you really do not expect them to. It is just another attempt to throw anything you can out – a fishing expedition, as is your wont. As we know – I am not sure if you actually have consulted with your Shadow Treasurer on this – there is already an FOI request for these documents in place as well.

Maybe, Mr Davis, you want to know a little bit more about how the Treasury role works. I know that you were Shadow Treasurer for a period. Maybe you are keen to learn a bit more about the process,

because when you are a treasurer you have to actually come up and face people with the costings for things. You have to come up with a budget, and you have to be accountable to that, and that is exactly what the Treasurer is doing and will be doing in just a couple of weeks time. I make note of Mr Puglielli's reference to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which will be undertaking that process. As Mr Puglielli says, that is the appropriate forum to do that – not these frivolous personal attacks on a treasurer, on a fishing exercise because you are all out of ideas yourself. And indeed, if you are going to ask what a treasurer does, maybe one of the things that a treasurer does is have their election costings ready before they go to a press conference to announce their election costings. That might be one example – some free advice that we could give you from this side of the chamber, Mr Davis, because that is one of the many things that a treasurer would do, or indeed in many cases a shadow treasurer.

So again, whilst I note Ms Terpstra's comments as well that we will not be opposing this motion on the basis that we do not typically oppose short-form documents motions, it is a ridiculous overreach. It is an overreach that Mr Davis knows is ridiculous and no doubt will fuel another vent and display in this place when he rails against the fact if we are in a position where, as I suspect, many of these documents – if not the majority, if not more – will actually be subject to executive privilege. It is an important part of our Westminster system. It is disappointing to see a party which is supposed to represent the conservative traditions of this state and of this place so readily keen to trash those Westminster traditions, but that is exactly what we see in this place today. That is what we see as a pattern of behaviour when it comes to executive privilege, whether it is in committee reports or whether it is in motions in this place and short-form documents motions in particular, and it is a trend that we are seeing that remains unabated. I will leave my comments there, but again, I will finish where I started: this is a ridiculously broad overreach.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:17): This is a narrow documents motion. It seeks a series of briefings that are provided to a new treasurer, a set of documents, a set of briefings that are easily locatable for the department. There is no question the department can do this quickly and expeditiously. It is true that we will FOI these matters, as we would with any treasurer and as we would with a range of different ministers.

Mr Puglielli, through the President, I say to you very clearly: this is not a gendered step in any way. We actually would do this whatever gender the treasurer was, and we have done so. I FOI-ed many of the briefs for the former Treasurer and will continue to do that, as you would expect with a scrutiny role of this chamber and indeed more generally. But I would say we are actually at a point where the state has serious financial problems. We have massive debt, we have the real issues of the state's taxation and other competitiveness, and it is important I think to understand how the new Treasurer has been briefed with respect to these matters, and that is one of the driving factors behind this particular motion. And I do agree there will be FOIs as well.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Upfield rail line

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:19): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Upfield train line has 4 kilometres of single track between Gowrie and Upfield stations, meaning that only one train can run at a time;
- (2) further notes that:
  - (a) the *Age* recently:
    - (i) referred to the Upfield line as 'Melbourne's most infuriating train line', with people often waiting 20 minutes or more for a train to arrive;
    - (ii) reported the Victorian Labor government had scrapped plans to build a turnback at Gowrie station as part of the Metro Tunnel project;

- (b) the Victorian Labor government has recently announced two new activity centres along the Upfield line, but has announced no corresponding increase to services; and
- (3) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all documents relating to the findings of the Upfield, Somerton and Wallan service enhancement planning feasibility study that was financially completed in the fourth quarter of 2017–18.

The 2016–17 Victorian state budget allocated \$5 million to plan for infrastructure upgrades between Upfield and Somerton to support new services to Wallan. I understand this feasibility study was to include investigation and planning for track duplication for the Upfield rail line, but the results of the study have not been publicly made available, and my constituents have written to the government asking for these reports, only to be brushed aside.

Track duplication is the best option to improve services on the Upfield line and would benefit residents and communities all along the line. The recent federal election saw both Liberal and Labor committing millions of dollars to further studying and planning for possible upgrades to the Upfield line. It is good to know the idea has bipartisan support, but there is a risk that the new federal study will just duplicate the work of the state study and kick the can down the road for a few more years to avoid real investment. We need duplicated tracks, not duplicated studies. When it comes to public transport options, the Northern Metro community does deserve better, and this includes the thousands of new community members we will be welcoming in the government's soon-to-be-built activity centres in Brunswick and Coburg.

The Upfield Transport Alliance, a key local advocacy group, are calling on the government to take meaningful action to improve public transport in the north, including keeping the government's previous commitment for a 70 per cent increase in capacity on the Upfield line when the Metro Tunnel opens; duplicating the Upfield line between Gowrie and Upfield stations and extending this duplicated line to Craigieburn, which will relieve capacity on trains using the Broadmeadows line; prioritising the electrification and extension of the suburban rail network to Wallan; and ensuring a 10-minute service on the Upfield line before the new activity centres open so that everyone in our community can turn up and go anywhere they need to go.

This is important work that the state Labor government should be continuing to prioritise, and it starts with releasing the documents from the feasibility study conducted between 2016 and 2018. I urge the government to release these documents without delay.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:22): I rise to contribute to the debate on this motion regarding the Upfield line and to speak to the significant ongoing investment that the Allan Labor government is making to deliver real, tangible improvements to public transport in the north. The motion raises concerns about the performance of the Upfield line, with particular reference to the 4-kilometre single track between Gowrie and Upfield stations.

Let me just say I absolutely understand the frustrations of passengers, and I welcome an opportunity here to reaffirm this government's commitment to modern, frequent and reliable services for our community. Looking at the facts, since coming to office Labor has added over 1250 new metropolitan train services, including 57 new weekly services on the Upfield line since 2015, and just last week the Minister for Public and Active Transport announced that the 2025–26 budget will fund more than 50 additional weekly services, bringing the total to over 107 new weekly services on the line. These changes mean trains will run at least every 20 minutes throughout the day, including on weekends and late at night. That is a game changer for the northern suburbs: more flexibility, more options and less time waiting on the platforms. It also means fewer cars on the road, less congestion and better air quality.

But it is not just about frequency; it is also about quality, accessibility and futureproofing the network. We are introducing the X'tropolis 2.0 trains. They are modern, accessible and energy-efficient trains built in regional Victoria by Alstom, supporting 750 local jobs, 150 of which are in Ballarat. These



trains will replace the ageing Comeng fleet – I do not even know; I know it is written on the side of the trains, and I get on them and love them nonetheless – and deliver a far superior travel experience. These features – can I say they are kind of exciting – include wider doors, smoother rides, real-time passenger information and state-of-the-art accessibility. There are 20 wheelchair spaces per train, there are boarding ramps, there are mobility spaces, there is pram storage, there is bicycle storage and there are hearing loops. This is transport designed for everyone regardless of their age, mobility or background.

In terms of infrastructure, we are building the network of the future. In 2020 we removed five of the most dangerous and congested level crossings on the Upfield line, at Moreland Road, Reynard Street, Munro Street, Bell Street and Camp Road, and delivered new stations at Coburg and Moreland – award-winning train stations, might I add. There are new community spaces, and there are upgrades on the Upfield bike path. These projects do not just ease traffic, they have transformed communities. I recently visited Nightingale, and I saw how the bike path has brought some new energy, with businesses like the local bike repair co-op thriving thanks to the increased foot traffic.

But we are not stopping there. By 2030 we will remove another eight level crossings in Brunswick, unlocking the equivalent of two MCGs worth of new community space; deliver two brand new train stations; and improve safety, reduce congestion and allow for much more frequent train services. Excitement in the community – it is building, and it is real. They know that this project will absolutely transform Brunswick and the wider inner north with new activity centres announced along the Upfield corridor. The need for reliable public transport is only growing, and this government is responding with integrated forward thinking and planning. While others have quoted newspapers and are casting some blame, I have got to tell you, this government is delivering real improvements. The Upfield line is changing for the better – and we heard that only last week from the minister – because of sustained, strategic investment.

As for the motion request for documents relating to the Upfield, Somerton and Wallan feasibility study completed in 2018, the government will not oppose this, consistent with standing orders and convention. We are committed to transparency.

Let us not pretend that reports build better transport; action does, and that is exactly what we are delivering later this year. Excitingly – I cannot wait – the Metro Tunnel will open, bringing more benefits by creating capacity across the network, including for the Upfield line. This is a generational investment with long-term impacts. And let us also be honest about who delivers. We might hear those in the Greens talk about public transport, but it is Labor that gets on with the job. We are removing the level crossings. We have got the new trains, the extra services and the infrastructure to support them. For my community this means less time commuting, more time with family, safer streets, more accessible transport and better connectivity. It means better access to schools, work and communities. These are not abstract concepts. They are being delivered right now. This is a government that backs the north, and the evidence is clear.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:27): I rise to speak on Ms Gray-Barberio's motion and concur with it. It is something that we are on the same page on, which you do not always see. It is Melbourne's most infuriating train line. And just to comment on some of the points raised by past speakers in regard to federal election commitments, you are right: it was a bipartisan advocacy at a federal level as well. I note that the federal Labor government committed \$7 million for another study into the Upfield rail line, connecting it all the way up to Wallan. You would be interested to know, Ms Gray-Barberio, that that \$7 million is going directly to the state government. So I imagine we will be here doing a docs motion in eight years time, again asking the state government to release that study that they have already done. We are asking for it now. They are then doing another study. This is not a federal study. This is a commitment for another state study on exactly the same thing. It is exactly the same document we are asking for.

My federal colleagues actually listened to people like Northern Councils Alliance, another local advocacy group, who actually recommended money towards a public scoping study, a public document, because we have not been able to access what the previous study said – because the government treats the northern suburbs with absolute contempt. We know it treats them with contempt. We know that because of the almost \$5 billion in blowouts on the Metro Tunnel they had to cancel turnbacks at Gowrie and at Essendon, which has reduced the capacity increase on the Upfield line. In November 2018 then Minister for Public Transport Jacinta Allan promised that the Metro Tunnel would deliver major benefits on the Upfield line – 70 per cent more passengers in the peak – and would pave the way for future duplication. Public transport experts have said that we will likely end up with a 7 per cent increase – quite the difference there. We were promised a 70 per cent increase, and we are going to get 7 per cent. Thank you very much to the government there. This is what happens when Labor cannot manage money, and it is commuters on the Upfield line that pay the price.

The idea of duplicating the Upfield line is not a new one; we need to duplicate the Upfield line from Gowrie to Upfield and extend the track to Roxburgh Park. This would enable us to electrify the track from Craigieburn to Wallan, where you have a huge amount of commuters getting onto V/Line trains. V/Line calls itself Australia's fastest growing regional rail network. It is only the fastest growing because we are cramming tens of thousands of people into growth suburbs that do not have proper electrification, like at Wallan, like at Donnybrook. Infrastructure Victoria have recommended this over and over and over again in their 30-year vision. It mentions the Suburban Rail Loop a couple of times in the footnotes, but it makes key points advocating for new stations at Kalkallo, Lockerie and Beveridge to cater for the needs of our growing community in the northern suburbs. Yet this government has sat on its hands. They have sat on a feasibility study which has already been completed and has been sitting on the minister's desk or in the department somewhere – and then they are out celebrating. I see state MPs with Peter Khalil celebrating new money for a feasibility study – a new one! – for the state government to do, when you have already done one. If you have already done one, release it – we need to know what this study says. If you are going to do a new one, explain why you are doing a new one when you have already done one. What has changed since then?

Commuters in the north deserve decent public transport, and we know the supposed announcements on the Craigieburn and Upfield lines will only touch the sides. The Craigieburn line has more passengers than the Frankston line but double the wait time. Commuters on the line to Sandringham and Brighton have faster services and more frequent services than those on the Craigieburn line, despite having a massively higher amount of passengers. It is the north that continually gets neglected by this government when it comes to public transport.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:32): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Ms Gray-Barberio's motion relating to the Upfield rail line, noting a range of matters and then requesting certain documents relating to a service enhancement planning feasibility study that was completed maybe five or six years ago. I will get to Mr Mulholland's contribution about why he does not believe that we should be looking at it again in a moment. But obviously as per the convention the government does not oppose documents motions, but in the context of the debate about the Upfield line and the remarks that have been made about the need to continually invest in Melbourne's rail infrastructure, I think you have a demonstration that in the Allan Labor government you have got a state government that invests in rail in Melbourne and that has an unprecedented commitment to improving the rail network here in Melbourne, which obviously has flow-on benefits across Victoria but particularly for our suburban and urban centres and then our peri-urban centres, who increasingly need access to the rail network. This government has an undeniable track record of investing where we need to in the future capacity of Melbourne's rail network.

We have obviously got the Metro Tunnel opening later this year, a project that will transform Melbourne's rail network and that has been delivered by the Allan Labor government, that has been fully funded by Victorians and that is going to make sure that Melbourne's public transport network has both the current capacity but also capacity in the future. We know that as our city grows – it is

going to be the size of London by 2050 – we need to keep investing in our rail network. We talk about it repeatedly. Often we get criticised by the Liberal Party for the investments that the Labor government is making in rail. Just this week we had the Liberal Party spokesperson come out and criticise the further investments that the Labor government is making in rail. For some reason the Liberal Party does not support Labor’s investments in rail in this city. It is a bit galling then to hear Mr Mulholland get up today and try and do a 180 and suggest that somehow in this instance the Liberal Party actually does believe in investing in our rail network, when every other instance we have seen, not just from this week but from the last 10 years, demonstrates that the Liberals have no interest in investing in our rail network. I do not know if it is just that Mr Mulholland is having a bad week after the events of two Saturdays ago, when his entire political strategy hit the fence pretty dramatically. What we see is a state Labor government investing in rail.

The other thing we saw – and Mr Mulholland mentioned it in his speech – is what appeared to be criticism of the investment that the federal Labor government has made in further investigations into the needs of the Upfield rail corridor and the needs of northern Melbourne. We think it is a good thing, frankly, that we have got a federal government in Canberra that cares about Victoria, cares about Melbourne and cares about rail infrastructure in this state. We did not have one for a decade when the Liberals were last in power. We are absolutely seeing the benefits of having a federal Labor government that cares about rail, a federal Labor government that cares about Melbourne and a federal Labor government that cares about Victoria working in partnership with a state government that has a demonstrated track record of investing in the necessary rail infrastructure in this city and in this state. If the Liberal Party do not support more investments in our rail network and if the Liberal Party do not support improving services to Melbourne’s established and growing communities, then they are just as irrelevant as we all think they are.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Before we continue I acknowledge the presence in the chamber of former member for Oakleigh Ann Barker.

***Bills***

**Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Rachel Payne:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:38): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Ms Payne’s private members bill the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025. It is a matter that has arisen out of the High Court’s decision in *Bird v. DP*, which was handed down by the High Court on 13 November 2024 in what were particularly harrowing circumstances. The High Court held that a diocese of the Catholic Church could not be held vicariously liable for the historic child abuse perpetrated by a priest, and this was on a particular legal construction held to be as a result of the lack of an employment relationship that existed between the Catholic Church and that priest.

I think it is fair to say that obviously I am not going to reflect on the High Court; they are the highest court in the land, and I am sure people who are listening and watching can appreciate the line that we have to walk when reflecting on decisions of the High Court. But I will say that the decision by the High Court in November last year overturned a prior decision of the Victorian Supreme Court, the highest court in this state, in state jurisdiction, which held that the diocese was vicariously liable for the actions of the priest, notwithstanding the absence of a typical employment or agency relationship that might exist between the diocese and parish priests. The Victorian Supreme Court in its finding held that the priest’s relationship with the church was akin to employment, which they held was sufficient to satisfy the first limb of the vicarious liability test. That was obviously a very important

decision by the Victorian Supreme Court, and on review it was overturned by the High Court, which returned to a more conventional, we might say, position about the characterisation of that relationship in common law and confining vicarious liability and the principles of vicarious liability to those particular employment relationships.

The Bird decision last year obviously had a series of significant consequences. It is of particular concern for those historical child sex abuse cases, particularly where the offender may have passed away and where establishing direct liability is more challenging due to the intervening time that has passed. Particularly it could mean that a survivor of sex abuse committed prior to Victoria's landmark 2017 reforms to the Wrongs Act 1958 may be left with no potential defendant should the offender be deceased. Obviously what the state was trying to do with those 2017 reforms was to establish a relationship through the concepts of vicarious liability to enable those court cases, those legal challenges and those abuse claims to continue, notwithstanding the death of the offender.

Obviously victim-survivors can pursue negligence claims against institutions where there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate direct liability – particularly where institutions can be demonstrated to be aware of the abuse – but the notion in the doctrine of vicarious liability is important in these contexts because, given the evidentiary issues that are involved in understanding historical cases, it has been seen as and has been an easier path to restitution than direct liability for a range of reasons but principally because it does not require the plaintiff to be able to prove facts relating to the state of knowledge of the institution at the time relating to the abuse. Obviously time is an enemy of establishing facts in cases like this, as also is the nature and the culture of the institutions that existed. I think what we have demonstrated through a range of inquiries over time is that the way that these institutions operated was to deny, was to hide and was to obfuscate, and certainly what we were attempting to do prior to this decision of the High Court was to find ways, such as using notions of vicarious liability and the legal principles that attach to it, to overcome that practice of those institutions and to use these legal principles in the pursuit of justice, which is what victim-survivors of child sex abuse, particularly that perpetrated in institutional contexts, so rightly deserve. Obviously the challenge that we have is that the High Court, being the highest court in the land, have settled this legal question for us in the common law, and their interpretation here is that the priest in this particular case, and as precedent, was not an employee, even though his conduct resembled employment.

I think it is fair to say that the government acknowledges the significant concern that exists within the community and within particularly the victim-survivor community of those who suffered at the hands of many institutions and particularly churches. We have on many, many, many occasions, particularly in the landmark Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in this country, which was initiated way back in 2012, brought to light through some quite considerable and extensive evidence the scale of the trauma and of the abuse that was inflicted upon children in Australia, particularly in institutional contexts and particularly by churches. I do not think we can deny that. On a very personal note, I happened to be working for then Prime Minister Julia Gillard when she set up that inquiry. It was a harrowing time, but the determination that she had at the time to make sure that a mechanism, the royal commission, was put in place to get to the truth of what happened is something that will stay with me. I think it was very important at that time. That is just a personal reflection in the context of this debate, because we do all understand, I think, the significant issues.

The other thing to say is that the Victorian government recognises the seriousness of the issues that have been put in front of us by the High Court and the challenges that exist. The Victorian Attorney-General is working with her colleagues across Australia via the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, which is the intergovernmental forum of ministers, to look at the implications of the decision and what we can do about it. The Victorian Attorney-General took a paper about this issue to the February meeting of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, and further work is being done to present options for consideration. Because this issue affects victim-survivors across the country, it is not just a High Court decision that applies to Victoria; it affects everyone across the nation. It is appropriate that a nationally coordinated response through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General

leads the work on the question of how we deal with the legal status and the issues around vicarious liability and that we approach this decision consistently so that there are not different rules that apply in different jurisdictions, that everyone has got appropriate avenues for recourse and that all victim-survivors are able to have the same path forward. We are committed to working towards that path forward.

The bill that we are debating here today comes from Ms Payne, and I think it is very clear, from the discussions that I have had both with her and with others outside the chamber, the deep commitment that she has and that others in this place have to dealing with this issue. I think it is an absolutely very genuine attempt to highlight the concern, highlight the problem, highlight the implications of this High Court decision and then proactively suggest ways that we might deal with it. I thank Ms Payne for that work, and I know there are others in this building who are equally committed to making sure that we absolutely deal with this problem. I think what you have from the government is not only a commitment that we will do something and that we will work on this but a demonstration that we already are. What you see from the actions of the Attorney-General thus far is that she is taking the lead with the other state jurisdictions on dealing with this issue. We had the High Court decision in December. There was a preliminary paper taken to a meeting in February. Obviously the caretaker period commenced around then for the federal government, and it has certainly concluded now. That work can continue apace, and I think that is the right forum for us to deal with these issues. The contribution that Ms Payne has made by the introduction of this bill is an important part of that and helps inform that debate.

There are obviously some particular issues with the detail of this bill that are being considered. We acknowledge that this is a very complex area of law. In making the changes we need to get it right. We need to make sure that the right and just settings are put in place so that the intent of what we are all hoping to achieve can actually be realised. There are significant implications from the particular proposition put forward in the bill. The government has already demonstrated it is working towards a solution, working with its state, territory and Commonwealth colleagues to address these issues. I think everyone wants this issue to be settled across the country for all Australian victim-survivors of this sort of abuse. I think it is fair to say that we would all acknowledge the concern and we would all wish that we were not here and that the High Court had not made the decision it did. But it has, and it is something that we are going to have to deal with.

I know there are many people who want to speak on this legislation here today, so I might conclude my remarks there other than to say we do particularly want to acknowledge those who are showing a serious and significant interest in this matter – and obviously there are many here today and listening to the conduct of this debate. My message to them – through you, Acting President – is that we absolutely take these issues seriously, we understand and acknowledge the implications of what the High Court has found and we are absolutely working with our colleagues at a Commonwealth and a state level to make sure that we have got the right solution to address the issues here. I want to commend all the victim-survivors who are participating in the dialogue around these issues for their continued courage and their continued efforts, and we will continue to listen to them.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:52): I rise to speak on the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025 brought forward by Ms Payne, and I state from the outset that, like the government, the Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this bill. There can be no doubt that the abuse of children is among the most heinous acts that can be perpetrated. To do so – to abuse the weak but also the innocent – is a depth of depravity that I cannot contemplate. It is right that our society through our laws condemns these acts for the horror that they are. As a Catholic, abuse within the church is something that absolutely sickens me. We all feel let down when our institutions fail us. As the late Pope Francis said, ‘abuse prevention is not a blanket to be spread over emergencies, but one of the foundations on which to build communities faithful to the Gospel’, and he emphasised the importance of proactive and foundational measures in preventing abuse rather than merely reacting to crises.

Ms Payne's bill comes to us as a result of *Bird v. DP*, a decision by the High Court, which confirmed the legal principle that vicarious liability does not extend beyond the employment relationship. In this instance the High Court held that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ballarat could not be held variously liable for historical child sexual abuse suffered by a plaintiff, because the priest was not an employee. This is consistent with previous decisions.

This bill seeks to deal with a very complex issue in a blunt way that could have unintended consequences. I acknowledge that this is a complex issue. We know this because the Standing Council of Attorneys-General considered the issue at their 21 February 2025 meeting and agreed to work together to further consider the impacts of the High Court decision and to consider potential reform options. That is an appropriate place to consider this issue in regard to a national approach, and we support that work absolutely. The first law officers of the land are working methodically to come up with a solution to this issue, and we think that it is prudent to allow this work to continue and to assess that solution on its merits.

The measures in this bill seek to statutorily recast the legal principle of vicarious liability to extend to certain circumstances where an individual is considered to be akin to an employee of a relevant organisation. The High Court refused to do so, noting the following in its judgement:

... without a "clear or stable" principle for the imposition of vicarious liability, expanding the threshold requirement to accommodate relationships that are "akin to employment" would produce uncertainty and indeterminacy in at least two ways. The first has been addressed – the "akin to employment" test has led to results in the United Kingdom which have expanded liability to relationships which hitherto would not have been understood to involve one party being liable for another's wrongs.

The second area of uncertainty and indeterminacy that comes from divorcing the threshold test for vicarious liability from an employment relationship is that it risks further complicating the already fraught distinction between employees and independent contractors.

The definition provided for the term 'akin to an employee' to expand the scope of vicarious liability raises questions about whether certain organisations or companies might be held liable, and retrospectively liable, for the actions of subcontractors and independent contractors. You could use the example of Uber being held liable for the actions of an Uber driver. The use of the phrase 'supplies the occasion' in proposed section 93D raises as many questions as it answers. So would the Royal Children's Hospital be held liable for, say, a volunteer, or would a political party be similarly held liable for the actions of a volunteer on a campaign trail? These examples underline the deep complexity of the issues at hand. I repeat my position that this is a complex issue and the Parliament should reserve its position until the Standing Council of Attorneys-General come up with a whole-of-Commonwealth position. I am pleased to hear that Victoria has an active role in the Standing Council of Attorneys-General.

I want to talk about the issue of retrospectivity in laws. Retrospective laws do have a place, and a limited place, in our society. A good example of that would be the laws which were supported by the Liberals and Nationals in 2022 to clarify the swearing in of Victoria Police officers. But retrospective laws that change the position of an individual organisation after the fact are contradictory to the fundamental idea of the rule of law. This is consistent with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in 2015.

To return to why I and the Liberals and Nationals do not support this bill, while it does have noble intentions, we think the bill goes about trying to fix a serious problem in a blunt way. Given that I mentioned earlier that the Standing Council of Attorneys-General are currently working on a coordinated national approach on this issue and we support that as an appropriate place for this issue, it would be premature for this Parliament here in Victoria to support this bill at a time when the proposed legislation has difficulties and has not been informed by the legal advice of the state and federal solicitors-general or considered by the state and federal attorneys-general. I think I will conclude my remarks there.

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (11:00): Last year's High Court decision in the case of *Bird v. DP* reversed a 2023 decision of the Victorian Court of Appeal in determining that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ballarat could not be held vicariously liable for known historical child sexual abuse because the perpetrator was not an employee. The case involved historical sexual abuse committed by the now deceased Father Bryan Coffey against a then five-year-old child. At the time Father Coffey was a Catholic priest at St Patrick's church in Port Fairy. Catholic priests, it turns out, are not considered employees of the church, as they are appointed under canon law and as such have no formal employment contract with the Catholic Church. This extraordinary decision asserts that there must be an employer–employee relationship to enable vicarious liability to come into play. Therefore organisations that hire or contract staff in a manner that is akin to employment – independent contractors, volunteers and the like – will not invoke vicarious liability.

The decision has left many victim-survivors in legal limbo, with their cases on hold indefinitely. It also has a far-reaching impact on cases of sexual abuse that have occurred in other non-employment-based or akin to employment-based contexts, including within the Scouts, sporting associations and schools. Worryingly, it potentially enables institutions to abrogate their duty to protect the vulnerable in their care, shielding themselves while increasing the suffering and marginalisation of victims and of survivors. The decision is markedly different from the liability placed on schools and organisations when their actual employees are found guilty of sexual abuse. The arbitrary distinction between an employee and something akin to being an employee leaves a great many victims of sexual abuse with no legal recourse against these institutions. That is simply grossly unfair.

I want to just give you one example of the type of claim which is now in doubt because of the High Court decision. This is from a submission from the Australian Lawyers Alliance, and I have used pseudonyms. Tom attended Scouts with his brother Harry. Both boys attended a trip with their Scout leader. Both boys were assaulted on the trip by the same perpetrator, who was criminally convicted of the abuse of both Harry and Tom. Harry was able to settle his case against the Scouts on the basis of vicarious liability, but this was prior to the High Court decision. Tom's story is different. He reported the abuse to police at around the same time as his brother, but because of a delay in the charges being laid, the perpetrator was convicted of his offence against Tom sometime after he was convicted of abusing Harry. Because of that delay Tom's civil case against his perpetrator was pushed back, and of course in the meantime, the High Court made its decision on the *Bird v. DP* matter. Tom has now been advised that his claim against the Scouts probably will not proceed because of that decision unless direct negligence can be established. So these are identical offences perpetrated by the same offender with two vastly different outcomes. Frankly, that simply beggars belief.

All victims of institutional child abuse deserve access to justice. Institutions cannot be allowed to wash their hands of these horrendous sex crimes against children because of the contractual basis under which the perpetrator was able to commit these crimes. It is absurd that this arbitrary distinction can allow an institution to be relieved of its responsibilities for the vulnerable in its care. At the end of the day, whether a perpetrator is an employee or a volunteer, they are using that institution's authority and power to abuse a child, and we know from the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that these institutions – wealthy, powerful institutions in many cases – knowingly provided refuge and in some cases even assisted serial perpetrators of child sexual abuse in evading any form of justice. It is disgusting. Following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Victorian government sought to ensure institutions, including churches, could be held legally liable for sexual abuse committed by people who were not technically employees. In 2018 the Wrongs Act 1958 was amended to include section 91, which imposes a duty of care on just such agencies and institutions. The then Attorney-General Martin Pakula had confidence that the laws of vicarious liability would retrospectively apply to survivors of institutional child abuse and be a reliable avenue for them to seek redress. Unfortunately, the High Court's decision has blocked the path to retrospective common-law protection for victims.

We cannot allow some survivors of abuse the opportunity to pursue justice through vicarious liability while denying this opportunity to others – possibly victims of the same organisational neglect and abuse – simply because in one case the perpetrator was not technically defined as an employee. Our bill therefore amends the Wrongs Act to make certain organisations vicariously liable for the abuse of children by persons working within those organisations by defining ‘an employee’ to include ‘an individual who is akin to an employee of the organisation’. The bill inserts a new part, XIII A, ‘Organisational liability for child abuse – vicarious liability’.

There must, of course, be a direct relationship between the activities carried out by the individual and the organisation, so an individual is deemed to be akin to an employee of an organisation if the individual carries out activities that are performed ‘by the organisation’ and ‘for the benefit of the organisation’. The conditions around when an organisation will be vicariously liable for the abuse of a child by an employee of that organisation rely on the apparent performance by the person in the role of an employee. This position must have authority, power or control over the child, the trust of the child or the ability to achieve intimacy with the child. The role must supply the opportunity for the perpetration of abuse, and the employee must take advantage of that occasion to perpetrate the abuse on that child. So it is quite clear. It is quite well defined. We reject what Mr Mulholland put forward in his comments about the technicalities, or for that matter, retrospectivity.

This new section does not affect and is in addition to the common law as it applies to vicarious liability. The general nature of this new section and the subsequent regulation-making powers are intended to ensure that claims are not inadvertently excluded from scope due to a novel or unexpected category of employee relationship. This will allow courts to respond on a case-by-case basis, correcting the shortfalls in the current law. The bill applies to all organisations that provide care or supervision or exert authority over children. It draws no distinction – no distinction – between the kinds of organisations in which child abuse may occur. It does not, however, extend to circumstances unrelated to the organisation’s care, supervision or authority over children.

There are cases where organisations subject to child abuse allegations have been unincorporated, with no separate or distinct legal identity. This makes it difficult for survivors of organisational child abuse to sue these organisations. In recognition of this the bill provides for unincorporated organisations to nominate a legal entity with sufficient assets for child abuse survivors to sue.

Crucially, the bill has a retrospective function and applies to alleged offences that have occurred before, on or after the proposed commencement date. We reject categorically – categorically – the assertion from Mr Mulholland that this is a case where retrospectivity should not apply. I think that position, frankly, is shameful. Victoria has a proud record of supporting survivors of child abuse, enabling them to be heard and to seek justice and ensuring that organisations are held to account for the abuse of children. The Victorian Labor government led the way with the groundbreaking inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations in the *Betrayal of Trust* report. In 2017 we became the first Australian jurisdiction to reform its civil liability laws to remove barriers faced by victim-survivors seeking to hold institutions liable for child abuse. Today Victoria has the opportunity again to show leadership and to extend justice to the victims and survivors of this horrendous abuse.

By removing the impediment imposed by the High Court ruling, we can ensure that a whole class of survivors of institutional child abuse are able to seek justice and we can demonstrate again to churches and other institutions that they are not above the law in this state. We cannot stand idly by. We know that the Attorney-General is meeting with other attorneys across Australia to discuss a resolution. But that is no guarantee that the laws will be reformed any time soon, and this is a question that must be resolved swiftly.

The bill is about some small measure of justice for the victims of horrendous crimes, and justice delayed is justice denied. I draw some comfort from a discussion last night with the Attorney-General and from Mr Batchelor’s comments this morning that this will be pursued vigorously and it will be



pursued promptly. The survivors of institutional child abuse have waited long enough for justice. We need to afford prompt relief to the many victim-survivors who have been legally gutted by the High Court's ruling. We ask for all parties' support for this bill. It is the right thing to do. I commend the bill to the chamber.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:11): I rise to speak to the bill that has been brought before the house by Ms Payne, and I have listened to Mr Ettershank's passionate and very meaningful contribution that he made to the house. In November of 2013 I stood in this place and tabled the *Betrayal of Trust* report that he referred to in his contribution. It was an immense honour for me to be chairing that inquiry over 18 months, and I know there are people in the gallery who are watching this debate today and who at the time were extraordinary in the contributions that they made to that very committee. At the time, whether they were speaking as a victim of child abuse or as a family member who was speaking on behalf of those that could not speak, they were incredibly brave, and I just want to pay tribute to and commend them all again for the work they did.

That was the former Liberal government. It was 12 years ago when I tabled that report. I make that point because in my contribution at the time I said a number of things. I said:

The criminal abuse of children is a fundamental breach of the values of our community.

I still stand by that; I think we all do. I concluded by saying:

President, I believe our inquiry marks the beginning.

And it did. It then sparked the royal commission which was undertaken and what evolved from that very important body of work.

My volume of *Betrayal of Trust* is looking very tattered with lots of sticky notes, and I often refer to it when debating because it was I think an incredibly important body of work that we did. We did look at this very issue extensively. We referenced various cases in other jurisdictions, and we made various recommendations around this very issue. The royal commission also said in their findings:

All Australian governments have recognised the need for redress. The ... Terms of Reference ... by all governments required and authorised us to inquire into what institutions and governments should do to address or alleviate the impact of child sexual abuse, 'including in particular in ensuring justice for victims through the provision of redress'.

That again was also a very important body of work that was undertaken. The royal commission went on to say:

... a survivor faces considerable difficulty when abused by a member of an institution, which does not have a relevant corporate identity and cannot be sued, most commonly a church. There have also been difficulties in establishing liability because of the reluctance in Australian courts to impose vicarious liability or a non-delegable duty on an institution.

But given that work and given those issues around the royal commission – and they did say they were considering whether changes to the law were necessary or should be left to the High Court to determine – we know that the High Court has made a decision that has been looking at this very issue. Therefore the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, which is referencing that very body of work also, is considering that issue, and I think that is important given the enormity of what is required here. It goes back to those survivors and others who are seeking to have proper justice and proper redress and proper accountability. It is very complex in relation to the intricacies, and I do understand Mr Ettershank's points around there needing to be acknowledgement of what has occurred. I am very aware of what you are saying, given the body of work we did and given what we heard. There is, however, I think, benefit in those attorneys-general from around the country looking at this from a national perspective, given what has happened at a national level around child abuse.

When you say that you are reassured by the Attorney-General and the discussion that you had with her last night – and, Mr Batchelor, I am sorry, I made the point that I tabled this report 12 years ago –

what the hell have these attorneys-general been doing? I make this point: get on with it. Get on with this work. You have had a meeting in February; get on with it and resolve this issue for people. I do think that that needs to be undertaken. Whilst I completely understand where you are coming from, I do think there needs to be that national perspective, and for goodness sake, I would say that the attorneys-general need to look at this, because we do not want unintended consequences to occur. Nobody does. We do not want that broad stroke to occur, and we do not want those unintended consequences, as I said, to flow on to other entities that could be caught up if such a provision was put in place.

Whilst I understand that there is significant concern – and I completely, completely understand that and I completely understand the frustration – I too am frustrated with the lack of action given by attorneys-general around this very issue, given it has been in the public domain for so long. As I said, it is a complex issue and it is an important issue. I think other speakers have spoken about the details of the bill; I do not need to go through that. I just want to put on record that whilst I think there are many issues around this and a lot needs to be resolved, I would hope that, Mr Ettershank, when the Attorney-General spoke to you last night, they were not just hollow words. I hope that with absolute priority the Attorney-General takes this at the national level and does something. For goodness sake, 12 years ago I tabled this report.

There has been a lot of tragedy that has unfolded since then with people that still have scars from that abuse, and I am very conscious of that and I am very aware of it, but I do think we need to get this right. I want to say thank you again to all those people that have concerns around this issue – I think it is an important one. But I do have concerns around us going alone without having that national body to oversee it, to ensure that we get it right and to ensure that around the country we have some approach that benefits all victims and does not allow the horrendous acts of the past to occur in the future.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:20): I too rise to speak on the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025 from the Legalise Cannabis Party on behalf of the Victorian Greens. The Greens support this bill, and we sincerely thank Ms Payne for her hard work in bringing it before us for the chamber to discuss today. I also want to acknowledge those who are present with us in the gallery and to welcome them, many of whom are survivors, and those who are following the debate along online as well. You are very welcome in this place. We see you. We understand the implications that this High Court decision has had, and we know that action is needed so that this new legal loophole is closed. Contributions to the debate today have already acknowledged the extremely long and hard road to justice that many people have travelled and continue to travel and find new obstacles to overcome along the way. I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the courage and the amazing resilience of people who are walking that road.

Closing that legal loophole is what this bill seeks to achieve. It is necessary because of a High Court decision in November 2024, the third legal case involving DP, a pseudonym, and Bishop Bird. The High Court chose, as has been canvassed in debate, to overrule the trial division and the Court of Appeal of the Victorian Supreme Court, both of which found that Father Coffey did assault DP, as he alleged. While the High Court was not asked to review whether Father Coffey's child sexual abuse of DP had occurred, the appeal instead involved technical legal questions about employment and vicarious liability. The court found that where there is not a relationship of employment, vicarious liability does not extend to relationships that are akin to employment, such as when priests are appointed under canon law. This decision effectively releases the Catholic Church from responsibility for priests' actions, including the historic abuse of children, where there is not a contract of employment.

Susan Accary, the Victorian president of the Australian Lawyers Alliance, said about this decision:

Bird v DP is an unfortunate white smoke decision by our High Court. Priests live in church owned buildings. They have their food and general needs paid for the by Church. Priests do the bidding of Cardinals. But because they do not pay tax or have a traditional employment contract, our law now says that the undertaking

of the 'Lord's work' is not equivalent to employment we recognise. It is a fiction to say Priests are not employed by the Church.

However, this is the current legal situation in this country, and we need to remedy it. In fact in the decision the High Court spelt out that parliaments must act. In the decision it said that fundamental changes to the law in relation to vicarious liability sit with the legislature rather than the judiciary. It is now six months since that High Court ruling, so it was urgent, and it is becoming more urgent by the day that action be taken.

The action required is to change legislation – Victorian legislation in this case. The bill today seeks to do that by amending the Wrongs Act 1958 to expand the scope of vicarious liability to better reflect the reality of how many institutions operate. It ensures that those institutions can be held responsible when individuals acting within their structures commit abuse, regardless of their formal legal status. I will note that the Greens also support that this bill has retrospective application, which offers support to past victims who were unable to access redress at the time due to the legal status of their abuser.

In November last year, just weeks after the High Court decision, the former Attorney-General of Victoria updated the house with a clear and swift commitment to resolve this issue. It was discussed back then at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, which is where all the state and territory attorneys regularly meet, and Victoria undertook to lead the national response on this issue. Since that time Victoria has had a new Attorney-General appointed. Two months ago I wrote and asked her for an update on the progress of this matter, reassuring her of the Greens support for legislative reform. I received a response to that today where the Attorney has outlined that the government in Victoria does have a track record of leading important reforms to support victim-survivors of institutional sexual abuse to seek compensation, including lifting limitation periods in 2015 and introducing a statutory duty to prevent child sexual abuse that rightly puts the onus of proof on organisations that were supposed to protect children.

There is the report that Ms Crozier has referred to extensively around the committee resolutions that have been brought forward through the parliamentary process. Another important reform in 2018 was removing the Ellis defence, which allowed incorporated organisations to avoid civil claims, and then in 2019 allowing courts to set aside unfair settlements. So there is work that has gone on in this place, and I want to acknowledge that it has been a collective effort of parliaments past to address this issue.

As I said, though, the barriers to justice keep re-emerging. The Attorney has confirmed that work is underway and that she will be returning to the Standing Council of Attorneys-General with options for consideration. There is some sympathy from the Greens for the opinion that one legal framework across Australia is preferred so that there is certainty and uniformity across the states regardless of where you live and access to justice regardless of where you live. We also know, though, that the reality of our federated system sometimes makes gaining consensus across states difficult and slow; if that is the case, let that not be a barrier to people accessing justice in this state.

We cannot afford to delay any longer. We know that already the decision in *Bird v. DP* has affected a case in December against the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and is holding up many others. There is no reason to wait if collectively states are dragging their feet. I encourage our Attorney-General to continue the approach of Victoria leading the way and to either support this bill or bring forward an alternative bill that could close the legal loophole in Victoria as well as providing a positive pathway to other states. I do wish the Attorney-General well in those discussions that are ongoing at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General.

I want to close by acknowledging the bravery of DP in bringing the original case against the diocese of Ballarat. That abuse happened in the early 1970s. It was a clear finding of Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that on average it takes survivors almost 24 years to tell someone of the abuse that they suffered. It is further institutional abuse by legal process by the church to have that redress dragged out of reach for years on end through the courts. Parliaments here in Victoria and across other states and territories need to act promptly so that we end

this two-tiered system of justice in Australia, impacting victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse by non-employees, depending on where they live and the date of their abuse. Redress and justice should be available to all.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (11:28): I want to briefly rise to make a contribution in support of this bill today. At the very top, I want to thank my good friend and colleague Ms Payne for bringing this really important issue for debate, and I want to acknowledge all the people in the chamber and the gallery here today to hear it.

The High Court decision that triggered this debate and this private members bill has had a really profound impact on all survivors and has raised considerable trauma, impacting thousands of people who were seeking justice but are now not able to. It has left survivors in limbo, with many cases indefinitely halted unless reforms are made, just like this bill seeks to do today.

I feel like this does not need to be said, but it is clearly the case that institutions should not be able to hide behind yet another legal loophole and wash their hands of abuse and trauma that happened under their watch by people who survivors had put their trust in. I have heard from a number of these people ahead of this debate on how it has impacted them – stories of retraumatisation, ongoing silencing and feeling gaslighted. I want to thank them for trusting me to read and hear their experiences so that we can do all that we possibly can to stop it from happening to anybody else but at the very least ensure there is access to justice when it does. Right now they are being made to feel that their abuse is somehow less valid or somehow had less impact because of the specific employment circumstances, or lack thereof, of the person who inflicted this abuse upon them.

The Catholic Church has insisted its members are not employed, unless of course it suits them. Let me give you an example of that. During the pandemic the Catholic Church successfully lobbied the government to amend the JobKeeper legislation to include members of religious organisations. \$627 million in JobKeeper payments were made to up to about 3500 religious entities, including the Catholic Church, and they committed that this money was paid to priests. Yet there is hesitation and resistance against this very reform, and I am sure that many in this room would agree while we are at it that they should also just go ahead and pay their taxes. Children and family place their trust in these organisations who have been unable to take any responsibility at all for their crimes. When that happens, it does not allow people to heal, to move on and to get on with their lives.

This is not a radical legal shift that is being proposed before us today. Similar laws exist across the world and throughout the Commonwealth, including in New Zealand, the UK, Ireland and Canada. I want to thank the government for their willingness to pursue this issue, as they have stated today, but I do also feel the need to say that this is a reform that really just should not be this hard and should be able to happen and happen quickly. The longer that we drag on this issue, the longer we leave survivors and we leave victims unable to just move on with their lives, to be given the validation that they need in order to heal and to finally be able to move on with their friends, with their loved ones, with their families. We have a responsibility to be better and to do better, and we must prioritise this important issue after the debate ends today. But for now, I commend the bill to the house.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:32): I also rise to speak on Ms Payne's private members bill, the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025. I just want to say at the outset that I thank Ms Payne for bringing this important bill and for her advocacy around this issue. I also want to acknowledge the many people who are here in the gallery today and who may be watching the debate at home. As victim-survivors of cases of abuse perpetrated by various people within clergy, the Victorian government has a strong track record of standing with you. We hear you, we see you, we believe you and we acknowledge all of the hurt and the wrong that has been done to you. As I said, the Victorian government does have a very strong track record of standing with victim-survivors. But again, I do want to acknowledge the many people who have also advocated along the way in dealing with this issue, and Ms Payne is one of them. Again, I thank you for bringing this bill. I also want to thank members in this chamber for the very sensitive way in which we have debated this matter today.

It is obviously a very sensitive issue, and I think it brings out the best in us as parliamentarians when we are able to debate this matter in the way that we have today and in a sensitive way. We may disagree on things, but we have got to remember that there are people at the heart of this issue who are deserving of respect, of treatment with kindness and of our making sure that we deal with this issue and get some outcomes as well.

Of course this matter arose out of the High Court decision *Bird v. DP*, which was handed down on 13 November 2024. Unfortunately it is not a very welcome decision, I will say, but it is something that we now all have to deal with as a consequence. Those who are in the gallery and those who may be watching along at home will know that this decision came as a consequence of the dioceses of the Catholic Church, and they appealed this decision. But it was held that they could not be held vicariously liable for the historical child abuse perpetrated by a priest, as there was no employment relationship. I myself am still a lawyer, even though I stand in this place as a parliamentarian. As a workplace lawyer it was something that came to my mind immediately as something that was part of the Fair Work Act 2009, which talked about how priests were not considered employees. So I understand the way in which the court has dealt with this issue, notwithstanding the fact that that does not give any comfort to those who are affected by this issue.

The decision was overturned, the prior decision of the Victorian Supreme Court, which found that the diocese was vicariously liable because in their judgement the priest's relationship with the church was found to be akin to an employment relationship. I think that was a very wise decision myself, because when you look at the relationship a priest has with the church, it does bear very strong resemblance to an employment relationship. But nevertheless the Supreme Court decision was then appealed to the Victorian Court of Appeal, where it was upheld, and then we found ourselves at the High Court, where it was determined that that was not the case. The High Court then did in fact return to the common-law position that vicarious liability is confined to employment relationships. Of course many in this room will already know that, but there may be some people who might be watching along at home who may be hearing this for the first time, so it is important to put that context around it as to why we find ourselves here today.

Of course the decision is of particular concern for historical sex abuse cases where the offender may have passed away and where establishing direct liability is more challenging due to the intervening time that has passed. I have been listening to the debate. I have listened to Ms Purcell and I have listened to what Ms Crozier had to say as well. Of course sometimes the wheels in government are slow to turn, but there are also complexities that we need to make sure we get right, because there would be nothing worse than rushing into legislation that means that we may have to revisit something or that actually does not address the concerns of those who were the subject of it. I know it is not satisfactory to those who may be listening to the debate, because these things do take time.

The argument will be that some people do not have time and that we need to deal with these things quickly: why can't we just deal with it quickly and have it done? But the reality is and the position of the government is that it has determined that it would be better to have a nationally consistent approach for a range of reasons. I know the Attorney-General took a paper on this issue to the Standing Council of Attorneys-General in February and was going to report back with options for consideration. So the wheels are turning, albeit perhaps not as fast as people would like, and I want to acknowledge and thank victim-survivors for their patience in that regard. But what it will mean is that as far as possible we can then have a nationally consistent approach to this issue, and I think that is important. It will mean that all victim-survivors will have appropriate avenues of recourse and individuals will not be left grappling with different legal settings depending on where the historical abuse occurred. That is important. We want to make sure that every victim-survivor can have their issues addressed in a consistent way.

What the Legalise Cannabis bill would do is amend the Wrongs Act 1958 by making it so that any organisation that works with or cares for children could be held vicariously liable for child abuse by individuals with whom they have a relationship that would be akin to an employment relationship.

‘Akin to employees’ is, in the bill, a broad and undefined concept and could cover a wide range of people involved with an organisation, which may include volunteers, religious personnel and contractors. These reforms would operate retrospectively, meaning that they would apply no matter how long ago the conduct occurred. Again, there is just some concern about the way in which this bill may operate. But having said that, we do want to acknowledge the widespread community concern that was generated as a consequence of the High Court decision. As I said earlier, it was a decision that was made by the High Court – not a very welcome decision for many people – and has obviously thrown up some legal complexities in the way this issue is handled and dealt with.

As I said earlier, given how complex this area of law is, it is not something that we should necessarily rush into. There are important aspects to be dealt with in a consistent way, but we also want to ensure that there is appropriate and detailed consultation around this and we seek legal advice about the different reform options that might be available to minimise the risk of unintended consequences and potential legal vulnerability. As I said earlier, the government would prefer to have a nationally consistent approach to this, and that is why the Attorney-General is working hard with other attorneys-general to ensure that there can be a consistent approach around this.

Again, I acknowledge it is challenging. I acknowledge that this is going to be hard for people to bear, given all of the difficulties that have already been traversed in regard to these issues. But introducing an inconsistent approach in Victoria without the benefit of the outcome of a national process, an in-depth consultation and robust legal advice on options would likely lead to accountability gaps, inequitable outcomes, potentially jurisdictional forum hopping or other unintended consequences. It is for those reasons that what we do want to stress and see is in fact a national approach.

We see that there could be disputes about jurisdiction as well, and inconsistent approaches between jurisdictions could lead to disputes about where matters should be heard. This is known as forum shopping, and it may impact access to justice as well. It may have these unintended consequences, which we do not want to see, and that could be particularly prevalent in the context of organisations and institutions that may operate at a national level. Dealing with these questions of where a matter should be heard is likely to delay the resolution of cases, and we want to make sure that people who are going through this process do not suffer any unnecessary delay or further trauma or hurt in the context of how their matters are dealt with. Often delays in the way in which matters are dealt with in a legally complex environment can add to the trauma and hurt that victim-survivors have already experienced.

In terms of insurance implications, insurance premiums for state-funded children’s services, charities and not-for-profits will likely increase, and potentially this could even be to unaffordable levels. Some insurers may even withdraw cover. This could also risk vital community services and volunteer organisations, and nobody wants to see that.

Just by focusing on those few issues that highlight the level of concern the government has with dealing with a bill in this jurisdiction today, I hope I have highlighted the areas of concern that the government has. As I said, significant work would need to be done to actually understand the likely financial and insurance impacts of the private members bill that is before us today. But having said that, I thank Ms Payne for bringing this. It is an important issue, and it is important that we are debating it today. Even with the financial implications, there are significant legal risks with the retrospective application of the bill which we would need to work through. Before we can move forward in an authoritative way, we also need to get authoritative legal advice about potential incompatibility with the constitution or the charter of human rights as well as any other legal risks. There are complexities contained within the way this bill is presented that may leave things open to further risk, and that is something that we want to make sure we get right before we move forward.

Having said all of that, my sympathies and heartfelt concerns go out to victim-survivors who now find themselves in this situation through no fault of their own. It would be good to have some legal certainty around this, and I can assure victim-survivors that government is working towards that direction. As I

said earlier, sometimes the wheels of government turn slowly, but there are reasons for that. We want to make sure we get it right, and at the moment there are too many uncertainties around this complexity.

As I said, the Victorian government has a strong track record in addressing institutional abuse head on, and we have taken a number of significant steps to support victim-survivors of historical sex abuse to seek compensation from organisations associated with their abuse. Victoria has in fact been a leader in implementing the reforms from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. That was an important royal commission, and many, many people who gave evidence to that commission felt heard for the first time. Victoria also lifted limitation periods, introduced a statutory duty of care, removed the Ellis defence and allowed unfair settlement agreements to be set aside. So there have been reforms undertaken in this area, very important and significant reforms, but we know there is more to do. As I said, the decision of the High Court was not a welcome decision for many, and it has also thrown up some legal complexities which we need to deal with.

I might leave my remarks there. I understand Ms Payne has some more contributions she wishes to make, but again I just want to thank Ms Payne for bringing this, and I also want to acknowledge and thank victim-survivors who might be here in the gallery today or are watching from home. You can rest assured that the Victorian government is working hard on trying to resolve this matter.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:46): (*By leave*) Firstly, I would just like to acknowledge everyone who has made a contribution today, and I really appreciate how respectful you have all been in your contributions. I will just take on a few points of what has been raised, particularly around exactly why we need legislative reform here and obviously the decision of the Supreme Court overturned by the High Court. Ms Crozier, in your contribution, thank you so much for not only what you have said but also the previous work that you have done in this space. I will take issue with what the government has raised around needing to take more legal advice and more consultation, because we know that the Attorney-General in Victoria is taking the lead with the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, but realistically when you have got all the chief lawmakers of every state, territory and federal government in one room, surely that is legal precedence to come together – they are the legal minds of this country. The *Bird v. DP* decision was handed down in November last year; that is over six months ago. We know from survivors that this has been catastrophic, and to not acknowledge that this needs to be done with a sense of urgency I think is a failure on the part of the government. I look forward to continuing to work with them on progressing this issue.

But the contributions that we have found most invaluable are not those that were heard in this chamber today; they are those from the many people who have reached out to my office – victim-survivors and their friends and families who spoke with us, shared their stories and told us about how important it was that these laws in Victoria be changed. I would also like to especially acknowledge those victim-survivors and their advocates who are sitting in the chamber with us today and those who are watching online: thank you for your contributions towards this debate.

I would like to make a special thanks to Karen, who is a coordinator of the Victorian Survivors and Supporters and the Beaumaris and Surrounding Communities – CSA Survivors and Families groups, and acknowledge that Karen's brother Ian is a deceased victim of child sexual abuse. Your tireless advocacy has not gone unnoticed. Thank you for all of your incredible support to me especially over these last few months. We appreciate all of you coming all this way, and we also want to recognise that those who are unable to make it here today are watching on at home, and I want to pay particular attention to the point and make reference to the fact that I stand with you on this road to justice.

With a change like this, it really does take a village. I would like to thank all the stakeholders I have been able to speak with about this issue over the last few months and the many groups who have endorsed this bill. To the Australian Lawyers Alliance, who represent survivors of institutional abuse, we thank you for graciously providing de-identified client cases and for your sage advice when it came to crafting this legislation. We would also like to thank the teams at Slater and Gordon, In Good Faith

Foundation, Knowmore and Judy Courtin Legal, to name a few. You all do incredible work, and your passion for helping victim-survivors access justice is incredibly clear. It is a testament to the importance of this issue that over 21,000 people have signed a petition calling on governments to urgently introduce retrospective legislation to right this terrible wrong. To all those echoing the call for change, I thank you. It would not have been possible to get here without all of you.

While we have been reassured by the government that they are looking into reforms on vicarious liability, we are here today to ensure that this is done urgently. There are hundreds if not thousands of victim-survivors stuck in legal limbo because the system that is meant to be helping them has been a hindrance for many years. The longer we take, the more cases are lost, never taken to court or negotiated out of court for a measly sum. We have already heard of instances where institutions and their legal representatives try and point to *Bird v. DP* in matters that appear unrelated to justify often little or no compensation to victim-survivors. This is not unexpected.

Institutions like the church have a dark history of avoiding accountability and exploiting legal loopholes at the expense of the thousands of children they allowed to be abused for decades. People in power looked the other way, and instead of being pushed, priests are often conveniently relocated. Grotesquely, this evasion of guilt continues to this day. We see it with the arguments put forward in *Bird v. DP*. We see it with the issue of permanent stays in many other places where the church seeks to try and escape accountability. Some may argue this is par for the course and it is the law that is wrong and must be changed. Granted, we agree with you, and that is why we stand before you today with this bill. At the same time, when you see statement after statement from the church absolving themselves from wrongdoing and consistently failing to identify and empathise with victims, the need for change is not just with the legislature.

We call on all institutions going through the legal system to consider what is really at stake and what they are winning or losing. We are hopeful that this government is sincere in their commitment to reforming vicarious liability laws here in Victoria. Victoria has never been afraid to lead the nation when it comes to changing the laws to provide justice for victim-survivors, and it is time to not be afraid yet again. We welcome the government's words of support and appreciate these reforms are necessarily complex and require due diligence. With that being said, if the government fail to act swiftly on reforms, you can rest assured that we will hold them to account.

In closing, thank you again to all who graciously shared their time and their stories. We will continue to push this government to act, and we stand with you on the road to justice.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:53): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until later this day.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.**

### *Committees*

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

#### *Reference*

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:54): I move:

That this house requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 27 March 2026, on how Victoria can best harmonise electric vehicles (EVs) with electricity supply and demand, including but not limited to:

- (1) strategies to reduce EV charging during periods of peak demand on the grid and increase charging during periods of peak supply;
- (2) whether public charging infrastructure is being installed at a sufficient rate in different parts of Victoria, including older suburbs where most people do not have access to off-street parking;



- (3) the best role for electricity distribution businesses in rolling out EV charging infrastructure, and how distribution network tariffs should be set for EV chargers;
- (4) strategies to facilitate the take-up of EV ownership, including the facilitation of bidirectional charging;
- (5) whether old EV batteries could have a second life as household or community batteries after removal from vehicles;
- (6) the barriers and opportunities to the manufacture, reconditioning and recycling of EV batteries, or other elements of the EV supply chain, in Victoria; and
- (7) any other related matters the committee considers relevant.

This inquiry will consider a number of important issues facing Victoria as we reduce our emissions and shift to a cleaner and more efficient economy. Electric vehicles are an important technology for reducing Victoria's carbon emissions, and this can actually be across multiple sectors, not just transport.

Transport is concerning because it is Victoria's second-largest source of emissions, and rather than being reduced, these emissions keep growing year on year. As we have pointed out as Greens in this chamber many times before, the only hope Victoria has to fully cut those transport emissions is to take a multipronged approach. Giving people options to leave cars at home entirely is a big part of that. It includes improving our walking and cycling infrastructure and running our buses, trains and trams more often to give people safe, reliable and convenient ways to get around without a car. But clearly Victoria also needs to electrify our car fleet as quickly as we feasibly can – private, commercial and state vehicles – and there is a strong role for governments to play in making that change as smooth as possible.

Those who own or rent freestanding homes with their own driveway and carport can save huge amounts on petrol by charging their cars at home, but there are significant up-front costs associated with this, which can act as barriers to uptake. Those who rent or have a house with no off-street parking or perhaps live in an apartment with strata-controlled parking areas face additional challenges, so it is important that Victoria's regulations and financial incentives are set up to make this change smoother for everyone.

Beyond transport, though, electric vehicles also have a huge and sector-changing potential to impact how quickly our electricity grid reaches net zero. The huge battery fleet available in electric vehicles and the huge individual size of EV batteries mean that they can actually absorb significant amounts of electricity, which overall for grid function can be a good or a bad thing, depending on the circumstances. The bad scenario would be when a majority of Victorians owned electric vehicles and were all to come home and charge them at exactly the same time – 6 pm on a weeknight, which is already a period of peak electricity demand – which would add a lot of demand at that peak time and could mean bringing more expensive and dirty coal and gas power online to cope with this peak, meaning higher emissions and higher prices. But the good news is if most electric vehicles are charged during the middle of the day when the sun is up, solar panels are pumping power into the grid and the demand is relatively low, cars plugged in at that time could help to absorb abundant solar energy, and then they would not be contributing to demand later in the day, during the evening power peak.

Just as this timeshifting when vehicles are charged can help to smooth demand, it could have a big impact on its own. We need to consider strategies that the government can implement to encourage charging at favourable times of the day. This might include things like electricity tariffs that incentivise charging at certain times. It might also include public charging infrastructure located where people's cars would already be during the midday solar peak – perhaps chargers at workplaces, shopping centres, railway station car parks or commuter car parks. Is there enough of this public infrastructure, is it located where it needs to be and is it enough to support those households who do not have charging options at home? With the rollout of charging infrastructure, what is the role of government and what is the role of grid operators and other private companies in this space?

The impact of electric vehicles on the grid gets even bigger when we start factoring in two-way charging. Imagine if we filled our cars' batteries to the brim at lunchtime with clean renewable energy and then gave that energy back to the grid at dinnertime. Imagine if, when everyone got home from work and switched on all their appliances to cook dinner and watch TV, that spike in demand was met with solar power stored in everyone's cars.

More good news about EV batteries is that they are generally much larger than your typical home solar battery. EV batteries can range from 60 to 80 kilowatt hours, while home solar batteries typically range from 5 to 20 kilowatt hours. To give some context to those numbers, the 91,000 EVs purchased in Australia last year alone have a combined battery storage capacity larger than all the big batteries built or under construction in Victoria currently, so it is a huge amount of stored power that we could be accessing, whether that is through people reducing demand by powering their own homes or through people giving back directly to the grid.

Two-way charging means that cars can be used to absorb excess power in the middle of the day and power our homes or the wider grid at peak times, helping to flatten the curves of peak supply and peak demand, and again, this means cheaper electricity and lower emissions, but we know that there are barriers to overcome to realise this future. On top of all the barriers people face to one-way charging, like having their own driveway, two-way chargers are still a new and relatively expensive technology at this stage.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Drug harm reduction**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (901) My question today is to the Minister for Police in the other place. As you would be aware, naloxone is a safe-to-use and life-saving overdose reversal medication that is now becoming more readily available in Victoria. It is great that people can now access naloxone from pharmacists and from vending machines, but we heard recently that Victoria Police are being told by their higher-ups that they are not allowed to carry this medication due to insurance concerns. Police in WA carry it as standard issue, and last year it was announced that Queensland police would also begin to carry this easy-to-administer medication. Minister, I would like your assessment: what is the specific barrier preventing Victoria Police from carrying naloxone?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:01): I note that some of that might overlap with the Minister for Mental Health. But in relation to your question addressed to the Minister for Police, I will make sure that is referred on for an appropriate response in line with the standing orders.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): I thank the minister. This is a low-risk, easy-to-use medication that saves lives in the crucial minutes after an opioid overdose. In Scotland, during the first year that police carried naloxone, they saved 53 lives through its use. Police are often the first responders to overdoses in our state. It is vital that they are equipped to offer life-saving care, and that certainly includes naloxone. Minister, will you commit to overcoming the current barriers, via regulation or legislation or whatever is required, so that Victoria Police may also carry naloxone?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:02): I thank Mr Puglielli for that supplementary question and his interest in this important issue. I will make sure that is referred on to the Minister for Police in the other place for an appropriate response.

**Water policy**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): (902) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the 2023–24 budget outcomes report from PAEC shows that in the 2023–24 financial year

\$640 million was torn from Victorian metropolitan water corporations in dividends and capital repatriations to prop up the struggling Victorian state budget. I ask, Treasurer: will more than \$600 million again be taken from the metropolitan water corporations in dividends and capital repatriations to prop up the 2024–25 financial year results?

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:03): I thank Mr Davis for his question, but I will take up the interjection of my colleague next to me in pointing out that this is a question that would be more appropriately put to the relevant minister, who is the Minister for Water. What I would also say is that you are effectively asking for information that will be revealed in next week's budget, and I will not be drawn on matters for the budget until next Tuesday.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): It is clear that the Treasurer will not rule out \$600 million or more being taken in this financial year out of the metropolitan water corporations in repatriations and dividends. I ask, Treasurer: isn't it a fact that the headline financial result in the forthcoming 2025–26 financial year will also be propped up by a similar amount, undermining the balance sheets of the metropolitan water corporations, putting at risk their capital programs and forcing up water rates on Victorians – an effective hidden tax on metropolitan households?

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:04): There is quite a bit of commentary in the chamber in relation to this matter, which is an appropriate amount of commentary because it is reflecting on the type of question that Mr Davis has asked. I will refer to my answer to the substantive, that matters relating to the budget will be something that we should be discussing once the budget has been handed down next Tuesday.

### **Ministers statements: drug harm reduction**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:05): I rise to update the house on the latest addition to the care and support provided by the Salvation Army at the Bourke Street health clinic. For 130 years the Salvation Army has been supporting and providing compassionate care to people in our city facing hardship and disadvantage. This new clinic builds on that care, ensuring people can get the health care they need at the right time from people that they trust. In partnership with Cohealth and Alfred Health, this health clinic will deliver much-needed wraparound supports, including primary health care, such as GP appointments; nursing and wound care; mental health support provided by Alfred Health; pharmacotherapy services; and social service navigation, such as housing, financial and legal support. The Allan Labor government is proud to support the establishment of this clinic as part of our \$95 million statewide action plan to save lives and reduce drug harms. The clinic is one of several key initiatives in the CBD, including \$21 million for the City Street Health outreach program run by Cohealth, intensive case management for the most vulnerable CBD drug users, the CBD reference group and the soon-to-be established community health hub on Flinders Street. I am really proud to join the Premier and many of my colleagues to launch this important service, which we supported with a \$2.9 million investment. Our government is committed to delivering the life-changing and life-saving care that is needed here in the CBD and across the state. We are proud to support care for those facing complex challenges free from judgement and stigma. Congratulations to everyone involved in this important service. I look forward to seeing its work thrive on Bourke Street for many, many years to come.

### **Drought**

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:07): (903) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. Minister, Victorian farmers are struggling with the dry

conditions across the state. I know the government released a drought package in September last year. Yesterday in question time the minister said she was considering additional support for farmers impacted by the dry conditions across Victoria. Now is the time for action rather than words, as time is of the essence. What kind of support is the government and the minister considering?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:07): Thank you, Mr Bourman, for your question, a very topical one. Can I say, just speaking as a member for Western Victoria along with Ms Ermacora, the issues that are confronting our farmers in the south-west in particular are front of mind. As you will know, the drought issue is led by the Minister for Agriculture, Minister Spence, and it is true that she has indicated that she is considering a number of things that will be –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Gayle TIERNEY**: Excuse me.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT**: Order!

**Gayle TIERNEY**: This of course is on top of the package that the government announced in September last year. We will be looking forward to hearing –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jeff Bourman**: On a point of order, President, I am getting it from both sides now. I am trying to listen to the minister. Could I have some quiet, please.

**The PRESIDENT**: The minister to continue in silence, please.

**Gayle TIERNEY**: I can also indicate to Mr Bourman that I know that DEECA, my department, has been meeting with the VFF and farmers as recently as two days ago and that there are a number of actions that are being undertaken –

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Jeff Bourman**: On a point of order, President, I do everyone the courtesy of not interjecting during their stuff. If people can do me the courtesy of not interjecting during my stuff, that would really help me along.

**The PRESIDENT**: I think that is a fair request. The minister to continue her answer in silence so Mr Bourman can hear the answer.

**Gayle TIERNEY**: I will refer this matter to the Minister for Agriculture as the lead minister for drought. But can I also indicate that in terms of the areas that I have responsibility for that feed into the information that is provided to Minister Spence's office, we are also working with the different water corporations to ensure that emergency water supply points information is up to date. We are also sharing clear information on water access points, which are incredibly important, and of course establishing a new trade room for groundwater in the south-west region, encouraging those not using their water to trade to other businesses. These are some of the things, as well as fit-for-purpose water-recycling work, that are underway, that are being put into place.

I thank you for your question; I thank you for your interest. This is of interest to everyone that lives in regional Victoria, particularly the south-west, but I would assume it is of interest to your particular electorate too, Mr Bourman, being the eastern region of this state. I look forward to providing you with that information from Minister Spence.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:11): I thank the minister for her answer, and she has led into my supplementary. I know the previous package focused on the south-west. I am hearing from

more and more farmers in parts of eastern Victoria who are now impacted by this drought, though some are impacted by too much water – it is kind of a strange thing. Will the additional support the minister is considering extend beyond the south-west of Victoria to other parts of the state that need it?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:11): I thank you for the supplementary question, Mr Bourman. It is absolutely accurate. As you said, there are certain parts even within your electorate that have had fairly heavy rainfall – really unusual, even for your part of the state – and yet there are some other areas where that has not been the case. I am sure that the whole of Victoria’s geography will play a part in terms of the minister’s considerations, and I look forward to seeing that response and passing it on to you.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:12): (904) My question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Martha and Victor are a retired couple who downsized and bought a duplex in Highett. They have raised serious concerns about toxic soil, loss of green space and compulsory acquisition associated with the Suburban Rail Loop. They attended a recent information session provided by the Victorian government and found it to be:

... a PR exercise with sugar coated answers to our questions.

They went on to say:

... we did the right thing and downside and now this government is put us in this position.

Why is the minister for the SRL punishing and talking down to vulnerable retired Victorians?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:13): Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for your question about the work we are doing with communities as we deliver Australia’s largest housing project. I note that the last question you asked me about the Suburban Rail Loop was back on 1 April, and since then we have seen your colleagues and the coalition go very, very silent on this project that you had previously indicated a strident opposition to. Just to be really clear before I get into the detail of the work that we are doing, I just want to note that your position remains absolutely unchanged: you do not support it, you have never supported it and you will never support it.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, it was a simple question. The minister is clearly heading out on a frolic into different terrain which is not related to the simple set of questions that were asked.

**The PRESIDENT:** I had some difficulty with the question, but I will not externalise it. I will just call the minister.

**Harriet SHING:** How fitting in fact that the interjection and the objection raised came from Mr Davis, who has previously been so strident in his opposition to various infrastructure projects that if you do a search on the word ‘monstrous’ I am sure that you will find every bit of infrastructure has been described as such by him in the past.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister is heading off on a frolic, attacking the opposition. She should just answer the question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will call the minister back to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** One of the things that we have seen is a commodification of the questions, the concerns and the desires for certainty of community members by those opposite. You are very, very happy to foment division and concern from residents about things that they deserve –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister is again attacking the opposition and refusing to answer a simple question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister was reflecting on the question.

**Harriet SHING:** When we talk about the work that we are doing with communities, it is so important that we underscore the care and the process and the time and the provision of the information across a significant period for people who have quite reasonable questions about the way in which this nation-shaping project is being delivered.

We have sites that have been operational since 2022, and the Suburban Rail Loop Authority has been working really, really closely with communities to make sure that the safety of our communities and its workers across sites and environments is the highest priority as works proceed. The discovery of non-friable asbestos is really, really common across worksites. There is dust and disruption that occurs across major worksites; that is not unique to the sites across the Suburban Rail Loop worksites.

We do have a range of mitigation measures to address the sorts of challenges that have been raised by the people in your example, and we do continue to work with people on the options available to them. I have met with residents who have expressed questions, concerns and uncertainties about the impact of construction works on them, as have local members. The member for Clarinda and a number of members in this place are continuing to have conversations with communities about the sorts of information that they need and that they deserve. There are options and opportunities, whether that is respite or temporary relocation. The sorts of consequences of disruption are met and addressed, and they include options for potential voluntary purchase.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:17): On the supplementary, Martha says that she has been:

... a Labor voter for 50 years ...

and that she has:

... lost faith in the Labor Party, particularly here in Victoria ...

reflecting on how she has been treated. Infrastructure Australia does not back the SRL, local communities do not back the SRL and even Labor loyalists do not back the SRL. Will the minister admit that she has got it wrong and finally cancel the Suburban Rail Loop?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:18): Right, so here we get to the nub of the question. Yet again you have taken local examples from people who want to know about this project and used them as the stalking horse for a particular political narrative, the sting of which is in the tail of the supplementary question, Mr Mulholland. Here is the thing: you have never supported the Suburban Rail Loop, you do not support the Suburban Rail Loop and you never will support the Suburban Rail Loop. In distinction –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, it is again a very simple question, and the minister is going to head off on another frolic to attack –

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister is being relevant to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** Infrastructure Australia do support the project, and you can see that in their report where they allocate it as a priority project. Mr Mulholland, the sorts of things in that report are basically part of the work that happens across major projects that are delivered with the sort of funding requirement in the Suburban Rail Loop. It is a priority project; Infrastructure Australia supports it, the Prime Minister supports it, the infrastructure minister supports it, the Treasurer supports it, Victorians support it. We have had four elections now, Mr Mulholland. You will never support this project. Just come clean and say that you oppose it.

#### Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:19): It is timely off the back of the last question that I rise today to update the house on Australia's largest housing project, the

Suburban Rail Loop. Major construction has kicked off with works powering ahead to prepare for the tunnel-boring launch site in Clarinda, where tunnel boring will begin next year. Tunnel-boring machines will arrive later this year before they start carving out the southern section of the twin Suburban Rail Loop tunnels. Last week I was delighted to join the Premier and caucus colleagues out onsite where teams are working around the clock to deliver this transformational project. I specifically want to acknowledge the outstanding work and ongoing support for this project from members in this chamber: Mr Batchelor; the President, Mr Leane; Ms Terpstra – really wonderful to see you on site; and the members for Clarinda, Ashwood, Glen Waverley, Oakleigh and Mordialloc as well. The Suburban Rail Loop will mean more housing on the doorstep of world-class public transport so that Victorians spend less time in congestion and more time with their loved ones.

On 3 May Victorians were once again asked to deliver their verdict on this project. They were given a very clear choice: a choice between Peter Dutton's plan to sack 4000 workers, block 70,000 new homes and deny Victorians the transport infrastructure that they have backed in time and time again or supporting the positive plan offered by the Albanese government to partner with us on projects like the Suburban Rail Loop and invest in Victoria. Well, Victorians made their choice, and they made it very clearly: for a fourth election in a row we saw that the partnership between the Labor government in Victoria and the Labor government in Canberra has been made abundantly clear.

So from Box Hill to Glen Waverley, from Cheltenham to Ashwood and across the eastern suburbs – a shout-out to the new members for Deakin and Menzies – communities have backed in the Suburban Rail Loop and sent a very clear message to those opposite. They want more housing and they want more access to transport connections, and that is exactly what we are delivering. You never supported it. You do not support it now. You never will support it. You have no solution and no plans for the problems that you are happy to identify and do nothing about.

### **Wangaratta-Whitfield Road**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:21): (905) My question today is for the Treasurer. As a major arterial road that services almost half of the municipality, the Wangaratta-Whitfield Road has been in dire need of upgrades for many years. The road is used by local cyclists, school buses, winery machinery and over 300,000 tourists every year to travel between the tourist areas of Oxley and Whitfield. The road is narrow and rocky, and it has potholes and crumbling shoulders. The surface of the road is not fit to carry the current traffic load, let alone the expected increase in tourist traffic that has been projected for the region. The Rural City of Wangaratta has plans and costings for works to improve the conditions of this road. Will the Treasurer commit to funding this urgently needed upgrade to Wangaratta-Whitfield Road?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:22): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her question. At the outset, it would be a question that would be better placed for the minister for roads, but I am intimately familiar with this project as local member and someone who has supported that region for the past 11 years and indeed lots of investment in relation to the tourism offerings there.

You describe Wangaratta-Whitfield Road, but the Benalla-Whitfield Road is also an extension of Wangaratta-Whitfield Road, as is Mansfield-Whitfield Road, so the whole corridor is something that I am very familiar with. As you have articulated, there are lots and lots of visitors going there, because we have been supporting particularly the wineries but also cycling tourism and the like to approach that region. I have had briefings with the DTP and Wangaratta council in relation to this road, as well as Tourism North East, so there are a lot of discussions going about this. I think that Wangaratta council have got some ideas; DTP probably needs to do a bit more planning. It is a priority.

The actual funding question: as I have articulated in this house, just because I am the Treasurer does not mean that every portfolio project should be run through the finance lens, but in relation to this project I am of a similar view to you in relation to advocacy for investment, and I think there is a bit of work that needs to be undertaken. I cannot foreshadow budget outcomes, but in relation to the

project you are talking about I am more than happy to have more conversations with you, because it was literally on my agenda with the regional director for DTP only last week.

### **Pharmacotherapy services**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:24): (906) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the Frankston Healthcare Medical Centre closed in January of last year when it was providing care for around 90 patients a day, including pharmacotherapy for opioid addiction and mental health treatment. Despite your assurance in the house last year that there was ‘capacity to support patients displaced by the closure’, Peninsula Health is unable to cope with the demand. Given it was known for months that the clinic was closing and your assurances to the house, why were provisions not in place to transfer all patient records from the clinic to Peninsula Health?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:25): I thank Ms Crozier for her question, because it does give me the opportunity to set the record straight about what is happening down in Frankston. It is a shame Mr Limbrick is not here, because he has been very engaged in these issues as one of the local members. The Victorian Department of Health is not involved in the service delivery and transfer of patient records. Ms Crozier would, I am sure, as a former health worker, be aware of the fact that as a primary care provider the Frankston medical health centre is overseen by the Commonwealth-funded South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network. So this is not a matter for the Victorian government in terms of those health records.

Just by way of background, my department assisted the South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network with keeping the clinic open as a temporary telephone service while a pharmacotherapy clinic was established at Peninsula Health, and we were very pleased to be part of that effort to ensure that there was continued access to pharmacotherapy, care and treatment for patients in the Frankston region. The Frankston medical health centre facilitated the transfer of those patient files as needed to Peninsula Health for patients requiring ongoing pharmacotherapy prescribing, and Peninsula Health, contrary to what the member is suggesting, continues to facilitate further patient transfers. There are no patients waiting for an appointment, and Peninsula Health have reported to my department that the demand from patients has stabilised.

I am further advised that the South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network has confirmed that many of the Frankston medical health centre’s patients have accessed a number of different services, including alternative prescribers at Access Health, Mediclinic Clayton and First Step, as well as Peninsula Health, which of course the government has been involved in supporting as an alternative to the Frankston clinic.

### **Ministers statements: Grampians Early Parenting Centre**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:27): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government has been supporting the Ballarat region by delivering parenting services at the Grampians Early Parenting Centre for the past 12 months. Recently I had the pleasure of joining the member for Wendouree Juliana Addison MP and the member for Eureka Michaela Settle MP to celebrate the first anniversary of the opening of the wonderful Grampians Early Parenting Centre in Lucas. We joined staff and families at the centre on the day to hear about all the ways in which the centre has been supporting these regional families in raising their precious children. We also heard about how this amazing centre is supporting its staff by extending additional career opportunities in the local area. On the week that we visited the Grampians Early Parenting Centre 10 new staff members had started, which included registered nurses, enrolled nurses, dual-trained registered nurse midwives, an admin staff member and also early parenting practitioners.

Our network of early parenting centres delivers services to assist families to manage parenting challenges such as sleep and settling, parent–child attachment and relationship, child behaviour, and



health and wellbeing for the whole family. We know that no two families are the same or present with the same challenges, and that is why at the early parenting centre we have a comprehensive team of professionals supporting families to achieve their individual parenting goals.

The Grampians Early Parenting Centre offers overnight and day-stay programs in a beautiful, peaceful and homely environment that includes residential units, day-stay rooms, kitchen and dining areas, beautiful playrooms and outdoor play spaces. The services can be accessed via referrals from GPs, health professionals and maternal and child health nurses or via easy self-referral on the website.

As we continue to roll out the Allan Labor government's network of 13 early parenting centres right across the state, we are supporting parents and carers to give their little ones the best start in life. As I saw firsthand at the Grampians Early Parenting Centre, we are also supporting regional communities to grow successful and rewarding careers in the early parenting support sector. Happy, healthy and settled babies and children allow their families to thrive, and it is the Allan Labor government that has recognised the importance of this. That is why our government is delivering these highly valued centres right across the state.

### Youth justice system

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:29): (907) My question is to the Minister for Children. In relation to the government's recent bail reforms, many stakeholders warned of the impact the laws would have, particularly on children in out-of-home care. The majority of children in residential care have significant trauma backgrounds and can exhibit challenging and complex behaviours; already they are often criminalised for behaviour that would not see them criminalised in an ordinary home. We were recently made aware of a young person who broke into a residence's pantry to get food and was charged with burglary, which was in turn subsequently increased to aggravated burglary because another person was present. The framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care, which has already been implemented in New South Wales, is aimed at developing ways to respond to the behaviours of young residents with proportionality and flexibility and, dare I say it, some care. Can the minister update the house on the progress of the framework's rollout here in Victoria?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:30): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. I particularly thank him for the way in which he has phrased his question, which is perhaps indicative of the constructive way in which he seeks to work in relation to these matters more broadly, so I very much appreciate that. I appreciate the nuance of your question as well in that we note that residential care is not a custodial setting; residential care is a home for a vulnerable child, and really the threshold or the key to what we are trying to achieve in these residential care settings is a home environment. To that end we have invested more than \$540 million from the 2023–24 budget across the residential care system to improve outcomes for children living in residential care homes. This includes ensuring that all young people in residential care have access to therapeutic supports by 2025–26. Eighty-five per cent have access to them now, and certainly by July of this year the remainder will have access to those. That has been a key achievement of the Allan Labor government.

In relation to the specifics of your question around the framework to reduce the criminalisation of young people in residential care, which was put in place in 2020 and appropriately reviewed along the way, the framework seeks to address the unnecessary and inappropriate contact that children in residential care might have with police by providing guidance for workers to support decision-making about police call-outs to residential care homes as well as additional guidance for police responding to non-crisis incidents in residential care, which, while I will not comment on individual matters, I think speaks to the details that you have shared with the house today. It is certainly a shared commitment across all of the departments of the Victorian government, as well as Victoria Police and non-government partners who work with us in the delivery of residential care.

In relation to the 18-month action plan, I am pleased to advise the house that 31 of the 35 committed actions are now complete. These key actions delivered include youth-appropriate resources which have been developed to inform young people of their rights and their legal supports; and training, including trauma-informed practice and behaviour-support planning for young people at risk of criminalisation. There are two further actions which are also due for completion in 2025, and these relate to the updates to the child protection and youth justice memorandum of understanding and the practice guide, which are currently being finalised with the Department of Justice and Community Safety, but they are I am advised on track to be completed within 2025.

It is also important to note that there is a framework of oversight and evaluation that the decriminalisation framework is subject to – *(Time expired)*

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:34): I thank the minister for her response. In terms of my supplementary, you may have covered this in part, but I will kick it into play anyway. In another instance of children being criminalised for behaviour that would be dealt with quite differently in a normal home, we know that police are charging young people in residential care for offences such as property damage and such as the one I mentioned previously, so that the department can claim the insurance on damage to the property. What steps is the government taking to ensure that children are not being criminalised to save on property maintenance expenses?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:34): Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for your supplementary question. I think the very existence of the framework to reduce the criminalisation of young people in residential care in and of itself speaks to that issue and many of the others that you have directly raised or alluded to in your question. The framework clearly is set up to avoid unnecessary and inappropriate contact with police. It is about providing guidance for workers to support decision-making about police call-outs to residential care homes and additional guidance for police responding to non-crisis incidents in residential care. It is also a shared commitment, as I have said, between government departments and Victoria Police. Indeed I was having a conversation in relation to a number of matters but including decriminalisation with the acting police commissioner only a few weeks ago, and I am very certain that it is also a commitment that he shares as to how we can ensure that police resources are not being inappropriately applied in a way that unnecessarily provides police contact for children who really are vulnerable children – as I said, these are non-custodial settings – who are living in our homes.

#### **Vacant residential land tax**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:36): (908) My question is to the Treasurer. The Treasurer will no doubt know Dinner Plain in the High Country, which sits at an altitude of over 1500 metres. Unlike other alpine towns, Dinner Plain remains unfairly subjected to the vacant residential land tax, despite meeting all the criteria of an alpine resort. The town endures a limited tourism window during the snow season and for much of the year lacks core services like public transport, medical facilities, supermarkets and community infrastructure. Treasurer, why do residents of Dinner Plain have to keep paying this unjust tax despite experiencing the same seasonal demands for accommodation that the resorts just down the road do?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:36): I thank Mrs Broad for her question. I have received advocacy from both local members in that area and also some residents. Some of the arguments they have made have given me an opportunity to look more closely at it, because I think that, as you have articulated, it is not directly an alpine resort. I am actually seeking further advice on this right at the moment in relation to options that could potentially consider some of the positions that have been put. I am not in a position to confirm any outcomes. There are other communities that have raised similar types of issues. But it is something that I am actively looking at right now, and I am more than happy to brief you when I have a firmer position in relation to a response. But it is fair to say that there is a collection of correspondence that I am sitting on because I have not wanted to respond in the way I have been

potentially advised. I want to interrogate that a little bit further. That is a reflection of where that matter is up to.

### **Ministers statements: Tiny Towns Fund**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:38): This is a really nice way to finish question time today. I want to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting some of our tiniest towns and communities in regional Victoria. It is one of my favourite programs, and I do thank previous ministers in the role for the creation of the Tiny Towns Fund, because it just does bring so much joy to the littlest communities in Victoria.

I had the pleasure to be in Waaia last Friday to announce the 159 projects that will be delivered right across regional Victoria. In Waaia the passionate community group led by Sue Cleeland have spent the last few years planning their project. The grain silo sits large and proud directly opposite the pub, which is really fantastic in terms of what this project is going to do, and with the addition of –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Let us just talk down our Tiny Towns while I am trying to be all positive about our Tiny Towns. Waaia were pretty happy that I was there Friday, and I did enjoy spending time with them. They will be receiving funding to produce a mural on that silo. It will be an opportunity to put that community on the map and become another destination on the renowned Victorian silo art trail.

The Tiny Towns Fund looks at things like walking track upgrades and community centre renovations, and there are grants available of between \$5000 and \$50,000 to really help these communities flourish, boost tourism and support local workers both during and after development of these projects. Other projects supported include a public environmental art space at Willaura in western Victoria, which will showcase indigenous plants. It will be an educational, cultural and artistic space for the community and visitors. The Daisy Hill Community Centre is another project that will see an upgrade to their kitchen and a modern functional space. Almost 350 projects around Victoria have been delivered under this project to date. I congratulate all of those communities for their strong advocacy and congratulate them on the outcomes of their funding.

### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:40): Minister Tierney will get responses for Mr Bourman from the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister Erdogan will get Mr Puglielli two responses from the Minister for Police in line with the standing orders.

### ***Constituency questions***

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1551) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns a very exciting development with the recent extension of route 798 further into Clyde North, which was extended just on Sunday, a few days ago – Mr Tarlamis and I are both very excited. It is one of four upgraded routes in and around the Casey and Cardinia area and the first to be rolled out, which is going to provide much improved service by extending that route into those newly established areas around the Smiths Lane estate and other estates in this very fast growing part of Clyde North. The area is growing, it is a wonderful thing to see, but with growing challenges. The provision of services such as these new bus routes are so important, and it is also wonderful to see that the route will be having a 20-minute frequency throughout the day. Minister, how will this route provide better services to my constituents in the south-east?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:42): (1552) I want to raise an issue for the Treasurer, and it relates to the emergency services tax. It is very clear that it is not just country communities that are being hit very harshly with this proposed tax. I am in receipt of correspondence from the City of Port Phillip, and they point to failings with this government's approach to the tax. Not only the Municipal Association of Victoria, not only country councils, not only country people and not only farmers but city people are going to be hit very harshly with this tax. It is a massive increase for every city resident and for every business in the city too. The City of Port Phillip has raised this matter with Ms Crozier and me in the recent period, and my question to the Treasurer is: will you meet with the city municipalities to actually understand the impact on city properties and the impact on businesses as well?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (1553) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The redevelopment of the grand prix pit building leaves the future of Albert Park as a community asset under a darkening cloud. Beyond an increase of two permanent indoor courts, Labor has not confirmed any investment in the rest of Albert Park. Despite the eye-watering price tag – \$350 million – from this week's announcement, it commits nothing to protect the parklands and sports fields, nothing to protect Albert Park Lake with its access to nature and the environment, nothing to support community use of the park and nothing to reduce the growing impact of the grand prix on Victoria's best known and most beloved park. Minister, my constituents and community park users want to know: why has the government refused to release the Albert Park sports management plan prepared by Parks Victoria and completed nearly a year ago, which details the infrastructure investment needed to bring up to scratch the sporting facilities in Albert Park Reserve that are not related to the grand prix?

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:44): (1554) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Can the minister provide an update on how the redevelopment of the Northern Hospital in Epping, including the new ambulatory care centre, will improve access to health care for residents across Melbourne's growing northern suburbs? I was pleased to see the construction begin on the four-storey ambulatory care centre as part of the Northern Hospital redevelopment. These projects promise to deliver new outpatient and specialist services, a redeveloped emergency department and a much-needed mental health and alcohol and other drugs hub. With demand for services continuing to rise in the north, constituents in my electorate are eager to know that these upgrades will reduce pressure on the existing hospitals, improve patient flow and deliver timely care close to home. I thank the minister and the Allan Labor government for their continued investment in public health.

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1555) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Minister, the simplest basic human function requires a toilet. My community and those communities who use Ringwood East train station lack the facility at times for the simplest human function because of the classification of the train station. I have implored you and the Premier and four other collective ministers to do what is right and allow for a toilet for those with a disability. Ringwood East train station is not staffed, but there is a staff toilet. So in a world where the Allan government is absolutely sensible and provides a toilet for staff when there are no staff but does not provide a toilet for real people who actually use the station: Minister, when will you commit to at least transforming the staff toilet at Ringwood East train station into a public toilet and then reclassifying it to a premium station? If you make people hang on too long, it might be you and the Premier who have to urgently go.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is the use of a prop. I do not want to ask another question about it. I just want to put the chamber on notice that you have had your one whack at it – next time you will have an early lunch.

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): (1556) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. How is the Victorian government improving train services for commuters on the Sandringham line? Yesterday it was great to see the Premier and the Minister for Public and Active Transport announce some service improvements across the metropolitan train network, and commuters on the Sandringham line are going to see an increase in services from 15 minutes now to a 10-minute frequency between peak services, greatly benefiting those commuters. Travellers all the way from Sandringham or Hampton right through to Prahran and South Yarra will benefit from these new services being brought into the network alongside the opening of the Metro Tunnel, which later this year is going to begin to transform the way Melbourne's public transport system and Melbourne's train network operate, benefiting everyone across our metropolitan train network.

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:47): (1557) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. I was recently contacted by a constituent in Kyneton whose daughter studies nursing at Bendigo TAFE. She has been struggling to arrive on time for class, as the first train only gets into Bendigo from Kyneton at 8:35, and then she has to catch a bus from the station to get to TAFE. The section of the Bendigo line between Kyneton and Bendigo is the only part of the Bendigo line that is single-track, significantly reducing speed and frequency. The government's regional rail revival included a commitment to deliver a business case for track upgrades between Bendigo and Kyneton, including track duplication. That was eight years ago, and yet nothing has come from it. Will the minister release the business case and commit to funding the much-needed track upgrades on the Bendigo line between Kyneton and Bendigo?

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:48): (1558) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, can you confirm that funding to upgrade the Howard Street and Midland Highway intersection in Epsom will be included in the 2025–26 Victorian state budget? Three years ago the state government spent \$600,000 to design and plan the upgrade of the intersection, and almost one year ago the minister said that project development was nearly complete. But work has still not started, even though this upgrade is a top priority for the City of Greater Bendigo. The intersection is very busy and notoriously dangerous. It has been the site of many traffic accidents in recent years, some involving schoolchildren, and last year's RACV report said it was the worst intersection in Victoria. The Howard Street–Midland Highway junction is in the Premier's own electorate, and yet the Allan Labor government has still not committed the funds to upgrade this intersection. This is a tragedy waiting to happen, and the Labor government must stop delaying the project and provide the funds in this year's budget.

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

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1559) My question today is for the Minister for Mental Health. There are several critical mental health services in my region that do not have funding commitments beyond June of this year. These are the mental health and wellbeing hubs at Box Hill and Greensborough and the youth outreach recovery support in Rosanna. The hubs provide short-term psychological support and interventions for people of all ages who are not reached by other programs, and the youth outreach program supports young people with complex needs, including those who present at hospital for self-harm and for whom residential programs are unsuitable. Both

types of support are vitally important for many people in my region. Minister, will you please confirm the ongoing funding for these services beyond the end of the current financial year?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1560) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment, who is responsible for Parks Victoria. It is similar to what Ms Copsey raised in relation to the Albert Park area and the \$350 million that the government has announced for the grand prix. There has been little or next to nothing for Albert Park in relation to some of those projects around Albert Park Lake: nothing to protect the parklands and sports fields, nothing to protect Albert Park Lake and the environment, nothing to support community use of the park and nothing to reduce the growing impact of the grand prix on Victoria's best known and best loved park. It is an important event; however, I have met with St Kilda Cricket Club members, and the Albert Park Sports Clubs Association have also met with me and the shadow minister. The question I ask the minister is: what is he going to do to assist the Albert Park recreation and sports facilities and protect their amenities in relation to future funding?

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:51): (1561) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to provide adequate funding for bridge and road maintenance and upgrades in the coming state budget. Many of our regional roads and bridges pose a significant safety risk, and many bridges are in need of upgrade or repair. The Calder Highway, for example, is gazetted for 85.5-tonne vehicles, yet the Bridgewater bridge has only a 72-tonne weight limit, restricting the efficiency of grain transport. Without targeted funding, ageing infrastructure will continue to add cost and time to freight, further driving up living costs. Rural councils like Loddon shire are burdened with extensive road networks and limited resources and struggle to maintain infrastructure. The disparity in funding between urban and rural areas is stark, with rural councils in northern Victoria generating significantly less revenue compared to metropolitan councils. I also visited residents in Ravenswood recently, who highlighted the number of dangerous near misses that regularly occur along this major road.

### **Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:52): (1562) My constituency question for the Minister for Energy and Resources concerns the government's solar rooftop pyramid selling scheme. Early adopters reaped 60 cents per kilowatt hour, yet now the Essential Services Commission has slashed the flat feed-in tariff from 3.3 cents to a mere 0.04 cents per kilowatt hour. My constituent Mary writes:

I have had solar now for about 5 years ... the feed in has dropped ... to 0.03c ... How is this happening ...

I'm so confused by it all. We were encouraged to buy solar panels and received a rebate ... and now we are being punished ...

Households are still urged to invest, yet battery storage remains expensive, with uncertain or impossible payback times. Minister, will you guarantee that solar households will not soon pay to export their excess energy, as in New South Wales, or will this government's sun tax, sun levy, be its 61st new tax?

### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:53): (1563) My question is for the Minister for Education and concerns the shortage of education support for children with disabilities within the current school system in my electorate. A constituent of mine has two children with autism spectrum disorder. One is in grade 6, and the other one is in year 2. The school she is attending is a special school and only caters up to year 3. Both are now forced to go to mainstream schools. The zoned state school they have been in has been assessed to be inappropriate for both children due to its large population. So my question is: can the minister please update my constituents if the Department of Education is committed to increasing funding for specialist schools in the western suburbs?

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:54): (1564) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The Labor government's mismanagement of the Gippsland line has continued on for far too many years. The punctuality in 2024 was 82 per cent and has been as low as 67 per cent in February of last year, well below the expected 92 per cent performance benchmark, whilst the so-called upgrades have the Bairnsdale service offering 43 per cent fewer seats following these so-called upgrades. Passengers continue to be shunted onto unsuitable replacement buses to make way for metropolitan projects, and quite often, unfortunately, Gippslanders are left stranded on the side of the road when replacement bus services break down. Indeed the V/Line staff are just as frustrated as the passengers. Minister, when will the government prioritise quality service and meet punctuality targets, and will it provide funding in the upcoming budget?

**Sitting suspended 12:55 pm until 2:02 pm.**

*Committees***Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Reference***Debate resumed.**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:02): On top of the barriers that people face to one-way charging that I have spoken about, like having access to their own individual driveway or not, two-way chargers for electric vehicles are still a relatively new and thus expensive technology. If we as a state want our grid to benefit from the electricity that these car batteries can store and later provide, we do need to support households to buy and install the two-way chargers that they will need to help make that contribution. In addition to the consideration of charging infrastructure, we also need to think about the vehicles themselves and think about them through their full life cycle. Shifting our light vehicle fleet to all electric will be a crucial part of reducing our transport emissions over the medium term.

What needs to happen to encourage take-up of electric vehicles? Are there opportunities to manufacture key components of electric vehicles such as batteries right here in Victoria? What other opportunities are there? What will happen as batteries age? Electric car batteries are typically larger than home batteries, so there is lots of capacity available, but what does Victoria need to put in place to take advantage of this? Can we find ways to recondition electric vehicle batteries to extend their lives in vehicles or to reuse them as household or as community batteries?

In my relatively short contribution today I have touched on a range of the emerging questions that we have in relation to these technologies, the way that they can integrate with our state's grid, the way that we can benefit and some of the issues that we should address if we want to avoid potential pitfalls as the uptake of this technology continues to advance.

The terms of reference for this inquiry will ask the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 27 March 2026 on how Victoria can best harmonise electric vehicles with electricity supply and demand, including but not limited to:

- (1) strategies to reduce EV charging during periods of peak demand on the grid and increase charging during periods of peak supply;
- (2) whether public charging infrastructure is being installed at a sufficient rate in different parts of Victoria, including older suburbs where most people do not have access to off-street parking;
- (3) the best role for electricity distribution businesses in rolling out EV charging infrastructure, and how distribution network tariffs should be set for EV chargers;
- (4) strategies to facilitate the take-up of EV ownership, including the facilitation of bidirectional charging;
- (5) whether old EV batteries could have a second life as household or community batteries after removal from vehicles;

- (6) the barriers and opportunities to the manufacture, reconditioning and recycling of EV batteries, or other elements of the EV supply chain, in Victoria; and
- (7) any other related matters the committee considers relevant.

There is a lot to explore in this very important area of emerging technology. I commend this motion to the chamber, and I do look forward to the consideration of these issues by the committee and the recommendations that will come out of this important inquiry, should my motion pass today.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:06): Thank you so much for the opportunity to rise today and make a contribution on the referral before us. Can I begin by speaking in strong support of the referral of this inquiry to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. It is worth noting my strong support does include the fact that I am not a member of that committee, so to those that, if it shall pass, will ultimately investigate this subject, can I offer my thanks to you for the work that you may do, because this motion before us really does seek to examine how Victoria can best harmonise electric vehicles with our electric supply and the demand – and it really does demand some crucial thinking as we accelerate towards a cleaner, greener future. It is an opportunity, this motion before us and the referral, to build on Victoria's proud record of climate action. It is an opportunity to tackle new challenges head-on, to support the communities we represent and to absolutely ensure that our state stays at the forefront of the clean economy. That is why the Allan Labor government will be supporting this motion.

Victoria has always led the way on climate action. I have spoken on it many times before, but this, excitingly, is an opportunity for us to reflect on the transition to zero-emission vehicles. Long, long, long before the Commonwealth government caught up, we here in Victoria were laying the foundations for the EV industry. In 2021 the Victorian government launched *Victoria's Zero Emissions Vehicle Roadmap*, a \$100 million blueprint to drive down transport emissions and pave the way for net zero. That road map had a very ambitious target – 50 per cent of new light vehicle sales to be zero emissions by 2030 – and it was not just talk. There were some tangible investments and real policies and some Australia-first initiatives, including the launch of Australia's first zero-emission vehicle subsidy program supporting over 10,000 Victorians to purchase an EV. That program alone sparked an increase of 310 per cent in EV sales in its first year. We trialled some zero-emission buses across Victoria, adding battery, electric and hydrogen fuel cell buses to our public transport network. We have invested in public charging infrastructure through the acceleration of zero-emissions vehicle adoption programs, ensuring that councils, businesses and communities have access to the chargers they need. And of course it is worth noting that the Victorian government has a large fleet, and in that is the big fleet transition and two commercial innovation funds. We have absolutely been relentless in driving this change.

But I understand that policy cannot stand still – the world of EV cars is rapidly evolving. What was cutting edge in 2021 is fast becoming baseline today. The global EV market has absolutely exploded. The price of EVs has plummeted, with Australians now able to buy an EV for under \$30,000, a far cry from even a few years ago, and the number of models available has changed – that was something I heard many times, 'There's just not much of a choice' – because it has skyrocketed from six in 2018 to over 100 today. Internationally, nations like China have invested hundreds of billions into EV production and exports. Here at home the Commonwealth has taken some really significant steps with the passage of the national vehicle efficiency standard reshaping the policy landscape for states and territories.

But importantly, the legal context has also shifted. The High Court's decision in the Vanderstock case last year fundamentally changed what states can do to support EV uptake. These developments demand that we pause, we take stock and we ensure our policies remain fit for purpose, and that is why this inquiry matters. So thank you, Ms Copsey and your colleagues, for bringing this before us, because it gives us a chance to examine the harmonisations of EVs with our electricity grid, ensuring that charging aligns with periods of peak supply and eases strain during peak demand. It allows us to scrutinise whether public charging infrastructure is being rolled out equitably, not just in a few new



estates or the affluent suburbs but in older communities where off-street parking is scarce. It prompts us to consider the role of electricity distribution businesses in this transition. Should they play a bigger role in rolling out charging infrastructure? How should network tariffs be structured to incentivise smart and efficient charging? This inquiry, I am excited to say, will also delve into bidirectional charging, a technology game changer. I have got to tell you, I am actually very much excited by this, because imagine a future – and it is already here – where your car is not just a vehicle but also a battery for your home, feeding power back into the grid when needed. That future is not far off, and Victoria, we have got to be ready for it.

There are critical questions around the second life of EV batteries. Once their life on the road ends, these batteries still hold really significant capacity. Repurposing them for households or for community energy storage could be a game-changing solution for distributed energy resilience. We know that Victoria stands to benefit from local manufacturing, reconditioning and recycling of EV batteries. It is not just an environmental imperative, it is an economic opportunity. Developing these industries here supports jobs, skills and economic growth, especially in our regions. Let me just say I could talk about those opposite, but I really just want to talk about what we have done, because there is such a big list and I cannot help it. Since coming into office in 2014 Labor has driven the decarbonisation of our state faster than any other state. We have set ambitious emissions reductions targets, and we have met every single one of them, Mr Davis. What an exciting thing to share with the chamber today. We have smashed our 2020 target. We have achieved an over 30 per cent reduction, when the goal was just 15 to 20 per cent. As of 2022 we had already hit 31.3 per cent emissions cuts, well within our range for 2025. It is a legacy that we are building on today, and this inquiry before us is a chance to make sure that Victoria's leadership continues, that we stay ahead of the curve and that we respond to new challenges with clarity and purpose.

For the people of the mighty northern suburbs, this work is especially important. Our community includes diverse urban suburbs, many with very limited off-street parking and high-density living. Ensuring equitable access to EV charging infrastructure is not just a policy detail, in fact it is a matter of fairness. We cannot have a future where only some Victorians benefit from the transition to clean transport, and this inquiry must consider how we support EV uptake in areas where private charging is not feasible and public charging is essential. I have said it before: I am in an old apartment, and there is no way that I would not be considering EV, but maybe there are some things that we could do better so that my neighbours and I can take it up too. There is an opportunity to explore how EVs can be integrated into our broader energy strategy. The growth of rooftop solar and home batteries has been a Victorian success story. Now, as bidirectional charging becomes viable, we have the chance to supercharge these benefits. Cars parked at home or workplaces during the day can store excess solar generation and feed it back to the grid in the evening, providing flexibility, resilience and of course cost savings.

We must ensure our regulatory frameworks, our tariff structure and our infrastructure planning are aligned to the future. This inquiry will also provide critical insight into workforce needs. Transitioning to a zero-emissions transport future requires skilled workers – electricians, technicians, manufacturers, service providers – and that is why the Allan Labor government is absolutely investing in programs like the Clean Economy Workforce Capacity Building Fund, ensuring we have the skills pipeline available to meet the industry demand. There are so many developments. From critical minerals to battery recycling, from innovation grants to direct infrastructure investment, Victoria is absolutely positioning itself to capture the economic benefits of this transition. But we must continue to listen, to learn and ultimately – the Victorian way – to lead. This is the value of this parliamentary inquiry: it allows us to bring together experts, industry, communities and policymakers to chart the next steps with evidence and engagement. It is not just about technology, this is also about people. It is about ensuring that Victorians have affordable, reliable and sustainable transport options.

I have got to say in supporting this inquiry we absolutely are reaffirming our commitment to real climate action. We acknowledge that while we have come very far there is still more to do. The

landscape has changed, but our resolve remains as strong as ever. Victoria will continue to lead. We will continue to innovate, to invest and to deliver for our communities. And we will make sure, as is the Labor way, that no-one is left behind as we accelerate to a zero-emissions future. I commend this motion to the house.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:16): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to Ms Copsey's motion 923. This seeks to establish an inquiry at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee – I might add a very, very busy committee but a committee that has done a lot of good work. To indicate that the Liberals and Nationals do not oppose this referral, we will make a number of points here on this as we move through. There are some things that Ms Watt said that I agree with and other things I do not, but let us look at some of the points on the list here of 923, (1) to (7). Point (1), the strategies to reduce EV charging during peak periods, is about point of time and actually the flexibility that new networks will certainly need – and I do not have any difficulty with looking at these points. Indeed we know that the grid is awash with solar photovoltaic in the middle of the day. This government failed to plan for it. I have looked at some of the briefings of the minister going back to 2020 and 2021 where she failed to act and deal with the huge growth in solar PV and to deal with some of the issues that needed to be dealt with to ensure continuity of supply and reliability of supply. So I say these are key points to look at these issues here.

**Sheena Watt** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I am just a simple fellow reading the briefs that were provided to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and they –

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, I do read them all. I FOI them and look at them and read them carefully and develop a very good understanding of what she has done and what she has not done and what she ought to have done. And she ought to have dealt with some of these issues of peak demand and peak periods, where the supply is actually greater than can be used in the system, and she has not actually dealt with that very well.

Next is 'whether public charging infrastructure is being installed at a sufficient rate in different parts of Victoria, including older suburbs'. Let me just say here that Victoria is a long way behind in this regard, and a number of my colleagues have talked about this in the last few days and said actually our charging infrastructure is far behind where a number of other jurisdictions are.

If I look at the role of the electricity distribution businesses, one of the things here that the state government has not done that it ought to have done is look at the capacity of the grid and look at the cost of grid expansion. We have had a very significant increase in demand in certain areas, but actually the process of electrification that is proposed by the state government has not been underpinned properly by the work that is needed to actually understand what needs to happen with the grid. We know with the Deloitte material and the Deloitte studies – this is one of those FOIs that the government is resisting viciously – that Deloitte have been employed, have been paid taxpayers money to do work on the cost of electrification and how it should be implemented, and unfortunately the underpinnings of their model and the assumptions that they have made in their work are not public, and the government will not release it. So the RIS, the regulatory impact statement, that relates to the electrification proposals is out publicly, but the understanding –

**Sonja Terpstra** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** The regulatory impact statement. You should, as a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Legislation Committee, understand what the RIS is. But the RIS has not got the Deloitte material with it, and the RIS does not have the assumptions and underpinnings in the public domain. Any interest group, any business, any household or any individual who wants to comment on the RIS is at a disadvantage because the assumptions that have been made in the regulatory impact statement are

not in the public domain and the government is viciously resisting the release of that information. Now, why would they do that? I would suggest to the house and the community that it is because the underpinnings are not up to scratch. I would suggest that the work is not up to scratch, and I would suggest, unkindly –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** I am not making it up. It is actually the subject of a VCAT case. You can watch the VCAT case if you want to. I will send it to you, and you can enjoy it. But the truth of the matter is taxpayers have funded this work, the assumptions are not in the public domain and there is now a regulatory impact statement. A RIS is driven by the fact that it should be in the public domain for people to comment on, actually understand what is going on, make criticisms and make reasonable commentary. Well, that is not possible because the material that is required is not in the public domain. I am just telling you those are the facts of the matter. The RIS is a flawed regulatory impact statement because its underpinnings and the assumptions behind it are not in the public domain.

If I can make some further commentary about the distribution networks, it is clear if you look at the work from Griffith University in particular that the push for electrification will not deliver in the way the government has claimed it will. Unfortunately, in the period ahead the truth is that gas is going to be very important for peaking capacity to fill in at times when there is insufficient solar or insufficient wind, insufficient low-emission technologies putting into the system. Particularly in 2028 and beyond, and in 2035, the truth of the matter is that gas will become more important. The Griffith University study makes it very clear that if you push to electrification very hard, you will actually just increase the demand for gas in those peak periods. So you are actually not dealing with the issue that you want. I think it is important to put some of these things on the record.

There are a number of other points that are not covered in this. I think the terms of reference are sufficiently broad to cover what is needed, but there are issues of insurance. I am aware of a number of owners corps that are worried about issues of safety and are worried about insurance. So there are actually just genuine issues. If you live in a complex and there is an owners corp, you may not be able to install the charging material that you need because the insurance for the owners corp and the body corporate, as it were, will not support that. There are actually a number of technical issues of this type that I think need to be thought through, and there need to be some solutions found.

**Sheena Watt** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I am not being critical here, Ms Watt. I am actually being constructive, pointing out some actual brakes on these things that have not been dealt with to date and could have been dealt with properly by the government. It may be that the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority has a role in that, for example. I do not pretend to have a solution to that, but I know that this is an actual problem that is in existence right now.

The issue of those who are in streets where they do not have on-lot parking is also a really significant issue, and people have not turned their minds to these points. The question of barriers to manufacture and reconditioning and recycling of EV batteries – I think we are a long way from this. You would want a proper product stewardship arrangement in place so that if you –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, it could be a state responsibility too. It could be a state responsibility. Well, let me pick an example –

*Members interjecting.*

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, Acting President, I just feel that the member should be able to conduct their response and communications to the house whilst others are in silence.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Mr Davis to complete his speech in silence, please.

**David DAVIS:** I do think the product stewardship matter is an important one, and states do have a role in that. We have just seen container deposit legislation introduced in the state here in Victoria. That is a state decision. The state decided to make that decision, and that is a product stewardship example.

**Sonja Terpstra:** It's federal.

**David DAVIS:** It can be a state decision if the state chooses to make it so. If the state chooses to absent the field, that is a choice that the state is making, and the state does not necessarily have to choose to absent the field if it chooses to do that.

I should say that the issues around safety are paramount in many people's minds; they want to see that our electric vehicles are safe and that the charging processes are safe. As I say, there are a number of owners corps – and these are ones in my electorate – that have come to me and talked about this matter.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Of course they have!

**David DAVIS:** Well, why would that surprise you? In Southern Metro you would be surprised that there are a whole heap of owners corps in large buildings where these – (*Time expired*)

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Before I call the next speaker, I would like to acknowledge we have in the chamber Sue Pennicuik, a former member of the Legislative Council. Welcome, Sue.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:26): I am pleased to speak on this committee referral. We support referring this inquiry to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. I note the very well informed contribution by my colleague Ms Watt as she leaves the chamber, and I look forward to what comes up in the inquiry. Given the rapid changes in the EV space, this inquiry is a welcome opportunity to build on our work in renewable and distributed energy and to strategically plan for the future.

I do note that it is a bit of a fact-free zone from those opposite and that the only obsolete thing that I hear in this chamber is the connection to the opposition's obsession with coal-fired electricity. It is absolutely in-built obsolescence in its best form. Even the owners of those businesses are saying they are not rebuilding – there is no future for that. There is always something wrong when it comes to something new happening in Victoria when it comes to the Libs.

Victoria's leading climate action includes being an early and strong supporter of electric vehicles, as evidenced by the Victorian government's zero-emissions vehicle road map. Our road map predated the Commonwealth strategy and includes many innovative policies. We have governed with early and consistent action to firmly establish Victoria as a leader in supporting the electric vehicle industry. Our comprehensive zero-emissions vehicle road map – ZEV road map, as I am going to refer to it – was launched in May 2021 and laid out a clear path to net zero emissions in road transport, including an ambitious target of 50 per cent of new light vehicles being zero-emission vehicle sales by 2030. As stated by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, as she was at the time, Lily D'Ambrosio, in her foreword to the launch of the road map:

... we want Victorians to have the best cars in the world – not the dirtiest.

She stated then that the zero-emissions vehicle road map is all about leading the market by replacing the Victorian government's car fleet with zero-emission vehicles as well as accelerating the transition to zero-emission public transport buses. It is all about stimulating the market by launching Australia's first zero-emission vehicle subsidy as well as seeding a commercial innovation fund. I do not know if Mr Davis wants to hear the facts before he leaves, but we have seen how well that has gone with solar panels in Victoria. One-third of households in Victoria have solar panels on them. People have voted with their own rooftops. And why have they done that? Because they are saving, on average, \$1000 a

year on electricity bills. That is the fact – not increased prices, as proposed constantly and ad nauseam by Mr Davis.

It is all about building infrastructure by putting electric vehicle charging stations in every corner of the state. Those goals have certainly been achieved within the \$100 million road map, which has often set a precedent for zero-emission vehicles policy across Australia. The \$100 million zero-emissions vehicle road map encompasses a range of impactful initiatives, and they include the subsidy program, the bus trial, accelerating public charging infrastructure, the integration of 400 zero-emission vehicles into the government fleet and the Commercial Sector Innovation Fund. Whilst the successful zero-emission vehicle subsidy program – which drove a 310 per cent increase in sales in its first year – concluded in June 2023, other significant programs are currently underway.

The zero-emission bus trial, now nearing completion, is paving the way for the ambitious zero-emission bus transition plan, announced in November 2024. We have committed to 100 per cent zero-emissions for new bus purchases by July this year. This will be a truly significant transition for Victoria's 4500-strong diesel bus fleet. If you have ever been stuck behind a bus billowing diesel fumes, there is also an ambient benefit as well.

The \$19.21 million AZEVA program – the acceleration of zero-emissions vehicle adoption program; we love our acronyms – is significantly expanding public and fleet EV-charging infrastructure across Australia. The AZEVA program includes the \$5 million destination charging across Victoria program, and that is a grant program. This program will install approximately 133 chargers and 241 charging points at an estimated 116 sites across Victoria by June this year. There have been 115 chargers installed at 95 sites as of March this year.

This includes a site in my own City of Warrnambool, where a new 50-kilowatt public electric vehicle charger was installed at Flagstaff Hill car park in November 2023. It is charging cars and charging tourism in our city. The location is perfect, as we have a large car park right next to Flagstaff Hill and the visitor information centre, and it is a short walk from the CBD, Lake Pertobe and the foreshore. Users pay 40 cents a kilowatt to charge their vehicles, with two cars able to charge simultaneously at a 50-kilowatt charging system. Warrnambool City Council were able to access a \$40,000 grant via the Victorian government's destination charging across Victoria program to help offset the construction costs of the new charger. The EV charging for council fleets program has also given out \$1.25 million in grants for 26 applicants to install 122 chargers at 55 council sites across Victoria.

You can see that there are a bunch of initiatives happening and that government has a role to play to stimulate, promote and get these initiatives happening so that the economy of scale will eventually start to pay for itself. I think the government investing in these things shows the public that they can have confidence in these kinds of infrastructure and in these kinds of vehicles.

The government has delivered on its committed \$10 million to replace 400 vehicles in the Victorian government's fleet with zero-emission vehicles. Some of my colleagues here in the Victorian Parliament are highly likely to be amongst that group. The ZEV road map also made a commitment to innovation and technology through the \$5 million Commercial Sector Innovation Fund. The projects selected to receive the grant funding included representation from rural and regional Victoria and the business sector, spanning agriculture, education, fleet logistics, commercial passenger vehicles and public transport. Let us get everybody having a go at this.

As the Minister for Environment and Climate Action Lily D'Ambrosio pointed out on 30 September 2022, we know transport accounts for 25 per cent of the state's emissions, so that is why we are delivering a significant package of policies and programs to ensure we are a leader in the adoption of zero-emission vehicles in Australia. This is an absolutely strong portfolio commitment. It sets targets, and those targets are being met. The results of those grants have been incredibly positive.

I would like to finish by thanking the Greens and Ms Copsey for bringing this forward. It is a changing space, and we can always benefit from new information – new changing information – at any point in time on this issue.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:36): I also would like to speak on this inquiry referral by the Greens regarding electric cars to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. The first thing I would say is that I think this is worthwhile. The Libertarian Party will be supporting this referral. I think that there are many technical and economic issues around electric vehicles in Australia that have not been solved and need to be looked at. The biggest selling electric car in Australia at the moment is the Tesla; I actually would not mind getting one myself at some stage. But there are many issues around the electricity grid and also issues around full-service driving, which I know in many states in the US is becoming a thing, and we are going to have to grapple with the legal issues around that. We are not really prepared for that in Victoria. I think the federal government is organising some sort of national approach between various states to look at how we might deal with that, but there are many issues, including around insurance and how that is going to work, who is going to be responsible if there is an accident – very complex issues.

Tesla recently has been demonstrating prototypes of driverless taxis as well. Sooner or later that is going to be a thing. To get an Uber you will just tap an app on your phone, jump in and it will take you where you need to go, and there will be no driver eventually. That is what is going to happen, and there are a lot of legal issues around that. What happens if the car hits someone or something? How do we manage safety? I know that many companies are also looking at driverless trucks; that is going to be a thing that we will need to look at. There are lots of good economic opportunities for driverless trucks as well – you can run them in convoys on highways and freeways, and that is a thing.

One of the major issues is the electricity grid. Large amounts of energy at the moment are transported and distributed through petroleum, effectively – through petrol, diesel and gas – and if that energy is not going to be a liquid hydrocarbon, then it is going to be electricity through the grid. We are talking massive, massive volumes of electricity that we are going to need – massive increases in demand. Clearly our grid is not capable of it at the moment and will not be anytime in the near future, and it will require massive investment to deal with that.

I will give you a local example. I was talking to an electrician quite recently. He installs high-capacity chargers in people's houses. You can charge an EV just with a normal electricity outlet, but it is so slow that it will take days before it charges. You can trickle charge it and top it up, but basically it is not very workable. So most people, if they own their home, will invest in getting a high-capacity charger. This guy had installed three chargers on a suburban street, and he said to me, 'That's it.' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said the transformer at the end of the street cannot handle any more capacity. I said to him, 'What happens if another person on the street buys an EV and wants to charge it at home?' And he said, 'Tough luck' – they would have to upgrade the transformers and they would have to upgrade the powerlines on the street. I asked him how much that would cost, and he said, 'Look, I'm not sure, but probably about half a million dollars.'

On suburban streets, as EVs increase in popularity and as more people want to install high-capacity chargers in their house, there are going to be a lot of angry consumers when they find out that they cannot actually do it because the first three people on the street have already done it and it going to cost them half a million dollars to do it, or whatever it will cost – some extravagant amount of money that most people would not invest. So that is a big problem. These are the sorts of things I think the committee should be looking at. How are we going to deal with that? Is it just first come, first served on the street, and if you are the fourth person that wants to install one of these things then it is tough luck? Or maybe you have already bought it just assuming that you can install this charger, and you become a very disappointed and upset customer. I think this is a big problem that we need to look at.

There are also some interesting things that have been mentioned throughout the debate: two-way charging, where you charge your car and have excess capacity, because they do have very large

capacity. If your driving every day is similar to mine, you are probably not driving large distances and you are going to have a lot of battery capacity left in that car. Using that to power your home – that could be a thing, but then you have got other issues associated with that. If you are using a free charging port at work, are you effectively stealing that electricity to use to power your PlayStation at home? I think there are lots of ethical and economic issues that need to be looked at with that. So that is a thing. As has been brought up in the debate, lots of people have solar systems at home now, and people say, ‘You can charge it at home.’ Well, most people use their car for going to work. So when the sun is shining and their house is producing lots of electricity, their car is not there.

There are other issues, technical issues, around charging. Lots of people seem to not understand the fact that there are losses. Whenever you charge a battery and discharge a battery, you always lose some of the energy. That is why a battery gets hot when you charge it, because you are wasting energy when you charge the battery. The same is true for electric vehicles. When you use electricity out of the outlet, you are wasting some of that in the process, because none of these processes are 100 per cent efficient. So there are many, many technical issues here.

I actually think that this will be quite an interesting and challenging inquiry for our Parliament staff, but I know that they have done lots of inquiries into very technical issues before and I am sure that they are capable of handling it. Assuming that this gets up, I look forward to paying attention to what happens in the inquiry and some of the conclusions that might come out of the report.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:43): I am pleased to rise to speak on this, and the Liberal–Nationals will be supporting this as well. For disclosure of interest, I own an electric vehicle. I have had one since 2017 in fact, so I would be on the early side of adoption. So I have got some practical experience of the practicalities and the impracticalities of electric vehicles. I was also living in London when I first got an electric vehicle and saw the transition of London’s infrastructure to provide for electric vehicle charging infrastructure. It was quite amazing, actually, how rapidly London provided for electric charging places in public, because, as most people would know, very few Londoners have their own driveways. Most of the parking is on the street, so the provision of on-street charging was a notable feature of the transition, and also in all the countries around Europe. In fact you can collectively say Australia and Victoria in particular are miles behind the rest of the world in what has become a pretty commonplace bit of infrastructure. What we have here is pretty damning on us actually.

Electric vehicles are here to stay. The economics of them is going to change and evolve over time. We are going to go from high-value, high-yield type luxury vehicles in the Tesla range to a mass number of much, much cheaper, much, much more affordable Chinese models. The second, third, fourth and fifth-highest selling electric vehicles are all Chinese, and now that they have got tariffs in the US, they are all coming here as well. So we are going to be awash with electric vehicles. They should be just considered part of the landscape really, not particularly special or different from any other vehicle, except they need a particular piece of infrastructure.

I am interested in this committee, but not for all the stuff about, if you listen to some of the contributions over there, how apparently electric vehicles are going to generate world peace and solve world hunger because of some of the grant processes that they have put in place; I am much more interested in the practical elements. A lot of the points that Mr Limbrick brought up are absolutely on the money – you have all sorts of issues over where you find charging points and who pays for the electricity coming out of those charging points. Many disputes actually arise on that front. If you are doing on-street parking charging, what is the best way to facilitate the capital into that infrastructure? The experience in Europe, which I think is instructional here, is that it was the private sector. They did not do government programs investing in what usually ended up being proprietary technologies. What we need is to make sure we have adaptability and compatibility and that there are no switching costs so you do not have 10 different companies with completely different charging and account systems, so that wherever you are and however the charging point has been provided you actually can go to and from between them. It is not unlike when mobile phones first came out and we made the very, very

sensible decision that we would have a universal network that could be cross-charged, rather than what they did in America and have cellular charges where you had to be on a specific network to do so. So I think there are sensible, practical considerations. The benefit of this inquiry would be, as much as anything, just to catch up with what people have already done around the world to make this work well. It is not going to save the world, it is just a practical bit of infrastructure that we need to have.

What is not in the terms of reference but should be perhaps is what Mr Limbrick said: there are massive issues around insurance, not just in self-driving but in fire hazard when cars are stored under properties, in underground car parks et cetera. There are a number of insurers who will not provide insurance for cars parked under apartment blocks. There are a very limited number of insurance companies who will actually insure electric cars at all. There is not great choice out there, and there is not great competition out there.

Alongside the undoubted environmental benefits of having electrical cars, particularly around air quality and things of that nature, we should also consider the environmental harms and risks of mass EV usage, because there will be consequences when we have a number of batteries expiring and we need to know what to do with them. Repurposing: I would love to; that would be terrific if it could happen. But it is not guaranteed at all, and there is obviously a degrading element, so whether that would be economically effective and practical would be something we could sort out.

The other part is whether we should have programs to facilitate the take-up of ownership of these cars. The thing I would like to avoid and that I am sure the inquiry could get to the bottom of is that we should allow choice. In fact in our family we consciously have one electric and one non-electric because the limitations of electric mean I cannot go and visit my family in the country, partly because there is no charging – but even if there were, it is very inconvenient; it just does not provide the range. People should just be allowed the choice. Certainly a lot of the early adopters of electrical vehicles took them up not solely because they were electric or in some cases not because they were electric at all; it was simply because they were good cars. Most Tesla buyers bought the car because it is a really good car to drive, and that is probably the greatest selling point of these cars: the driving experience and utility of these cars are actually really great, within range. Some people ask me, ‘What’s it like driving a Tesla?’ I say, ‘Well, it’s like driving a laptop, really; it’s not like driving a car at all.’ It is a bit like the evolution of the mobile phone into a smartphone: it has now got all sorts of utilities it did not have, including recharging abilities and things.

I will say on recharging, though, it is a little bit fanciful that you could go home and charge your house off your electrical vehicle battery. They do not store enough power to do it, unless your car is fully charged and you are not intending to go out and get milk or do another couple of errands that night; there is not enough power in those car batteries to do that. Maybe they will in some future time, but not in the next five to 10 years, certainly. They do not have that capacity. The upside is not as massive as everyone thinks. I think the real problem to solve is, like most things in innovation and new technologies, either government is simply not getting out of the way quickly enough to allow the private sector to get on and build the infrastructure and get the capital in to do it or we have got antiquated laws artificially stopping people getting ahead of it. I do not think we need and I would not like to see tax incentives or other programs financially coercing people into buying EVs unnecessarily.

Quickly, praising the terms of reference, I am on that committee. It is a busy committee. Should it be at the top of the agenda when we have to consider other things? No, but it is timely. The thing that occurs to me is considering whether this should be an inquiry. Really, frankly, it should be just something done in the department. It is not rocket science, the stuff that we are talking about here; it does not really require an inquiry. The only reason it actually looks like we might need to have one is because the government has not done its own homework. It is pretty rudimentary stuff about providing infrastructure for electrical vehicles – big deal. It is not rocket science, it is not novel, it is not new. It has been done elsewhere. There are plenty of precedents to call on, and there are plenty of regulations to call on. I do not know what the fuss is except that I can see that we have a growing gap in our programs, which means Victoria is being held back, and I do not like seeing Victoria held back,



because Victoria needs to maximise every economic opportunity at this point. I will conclude my contribution there.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:52): We are just doing some research on this side which we will be able to come to in a moment, but I will hold you in suspense on that for the moment. It is great to hear Mr Welch – he has his EV. I have noticed it out in the parking lot, so I congratulate him on that. I hope it does not impact on your preselection chances, Mr Welch. I know that the minds of those in your party will be popping and blowing that any sort of new technology dare be anywhere near the realm of the Liberal Party. So I congratulate you. I do want to disagree with some of the other comments you made in your speech, but yet again we see Labor Party in the sensible centre. We see the Liberal Party torn apart by their anti-technology positions. I have said it before and I will say it again: if they could get their energy from harpooning blue whales still, if there were enough of them around that were not protected, they would be absolutely out there doing it and running on candles.

Then of course there are the Greens. I note that in the speech they talked about imagining things like vehicle to grid. We do not need to imagine it – the trials are being done, the work is being done, the technology is coming, it is rolling out – and I am really proud to be a member of Labor Party, a representative of the Labor Party that gets on with delivering things at state and federal levels that we need here in this state and around this country.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH**: Thank you for asking me. I do have an EV, and I just happened today to be looking to turn it over to get another one. I have just done 18 months, or not quite 18 months – I have just knocked over my 50,000 k. Mr Welch was talking about range – I have taken it up to New South Wales a couple of times; I have taken it around Tasmania. Ranges are increasing all the time, and Mr Welch did make a very spot-on comment about the fact that it is inevitable, the process, in electric vehicles. You look at car shows around the world and 90, 95 per cent of vehicles are electric. So we know that is the way the technology is going.

Mr Limbrick, with all due respect, I just want to pull you up with a couple of points you made. Yes, the commentary has been around transistors popping on streets when everyone plugs it in. The same could be said if everyone wants to plug in their three-phase oven at the same time – the trannies are going to blow. That is not the practice; the majority of suburban city dwellers do not need to charge their car every night. You can if you wish – you can give it a little top-up – but you do not need to charge it that frequently. I am an electrician as well, by the way, just to put that on the record – when we first started wiring up houses, we were using 1- or 1.5-mil wires. Over time we upgraded those. We used to use fuse wires for switchboards. We upgraded those to circuit breakers, then to residual current devices. We have adapted to modern technology which is most fit for purpose for the current time and most fit for purpose for keeping the people in those homes, people in businesses and people in public places safe. We emerge to the technology of the day. From an electrical perspective, yes, there may be work we do over time, but there is always work we do over time with every new technology. We had the investment in our gas lanterns that were around this city; they have moved over to electric. And now the way that we generate our electricity is different.

The other point I want to come to is the supply of electricity for the cars. Yes, that is something we all have to be conscious of. And something that again I am proud of on this side is that rather than denying, delaying or detracting from action like the Liberal–National coalition have done over the last 20 years on energy – as I have said many times in this place, they had 20 different energy policies under their nine years in federal government, giving industry no certainty of investment.

Mr Welch talked about getting out of the way and letting industry invest. I will tell you what, when the nuclear policy was on the table and they were asking government to invest \$600 billion to build 4 per cent of generation capacity in this country, where was the Liberals' get-out-of-the-way mentality? I cannot wait to hear from Mrs McArthur about what she thinks of nuclear energy when

we talk about powering EVs, because I am sure Mrs McArthur, like Ted O'Brien – yes, the thumb is up over there. They still want nuclear energy, even though it does not make any sense from a cost perspective and it does not make any sense from a technological perspective. Anyway, we are not here to discuss nuclear, but it was raised on the other side, about the generation capacity, so I wanted to come to it.

My esteemed colleague Ms Terpstra raised with me just before about range and capacity to move people. We have great news right here today for the Liberal Party of Victoria: Volkswagen are bringing out an electric kombi. Given that they have got half a dozen members in the federal lower house, bang, they are going to be able to get themselves all around the state. They are going to get the electric kombi, they are going to get it badged up with the Liberal Party and they are going to all be able to hop in. They will arrange a driver, and they will be able to drive from A to B, going around doing their anti-renewable rhetoric, their anti-EV rhetoric – whatever rhetoric, I forget – how they want to frack. They will be able to drive around town telling landholders how they are going to rip up the agricultural land and frack it all. It is all there. They can do it in an EV.

Something that really, really has grated me over the years is one of the Liberals' scare campaigns and their negativity. I will give you a little story. I was at the election the other day. The last how-to-vote I handed out was to a young sparky who walked past me. I said, 'Here you go, mate. Vote Labor. Sparky, sparky – vote Labor.' And this this crusty, negative, hate-filled Lib goes to him, 'They're going to tax your ute.' I turned around and I said, 'Mate, you'll have a job for the rest of your life in your trade.' And he just went, 'Yes, Labor all the way.'

I am proud that we have these vehicle efficiency standards. The Libs went on for years – I cannot even get to all the things we are doing; I am going to get there – about how we were going to take away the weekend. Do you know what gives you a weekend? An electric ute, when you can plug in all your tools in the back – a kombi van! When you can pull up in the bush – and Ms Bath loves camping; you might want to listen to this, Ms Bath. You pull up in your ute and just plug into your outlet in the back. You have got 60, 70, 80 kilowatts under the hood, and you can do whatever you want out bush for a week. No-one is interrupting you and no-one is getting in your way. What a beautiful thing. The fact is you can pull up on a site and you do not have to worry about fuel, you do not have to worry about generators. All your tools are charged, and you can get on with the work. That is fantastic.

So if the Liberal Party could get rid of their hatred of new technology – you know, we moved from chequebooks, we moved to ATMs and we are now paying on our mobile phones. Mobile phone technology has moved pretty quickly. Mr Welch mentioned before going from a Nokia 32 to a smartphone. Well, that maybe was not exactly how he phrased it, but that is exactly right. Technology moves. So let us not be scared. Let us adopt and embrace new technology.

I said before I have had the car, done my 50,000 k's. I am really proud that this government has invested \$100 million in supporting EV charging and EV infrastructure around this state. We are seeing all new buses as of this year – 4500 buses – will be electric, getting diesel particulate out of the air, clean air, and they will be much, much quieter getting around our streets. From a regional Victorian perspective, the fact is that we have EV charging infrastructure that people can plug in and keep going with. I did a post in December showing all the EV charging points around eastern Victoria. I have been able to rack up, as I have said, tens of thousands of kilometres. When I have needed that charging infrastructure, it has been there for me. I am really proud to be part of a government that has delivered that right across the state.

There are going to be benefits to home owners with PV, as we know, being able to charge their car. Mr Limbrick was saying they might not be home. If you are charging once a week, you can do it on weekends. Do you know what else people do from home? They work from home. We know Mr Dutton did not like working from home. If they are working from home, they can plug it in out the front for the day and they will be fully charged, no worries.

You know what a whole lot of Victorians say – ‘Stuff it. I don’t want to get my fuel from Russia. I don’t want to get it shipped around the world past a whole lot of nations that could put a blockade on this country.’ We want to be self-reliant. We want to support farmers to diversify their income. We want Aussie jobs to support Aussie farmers and Aussie generators to send that electricity into Victorian homes and into Victorian businesses and charge cars that are resilient, that are here, that are not open to inflationary price shocks of geopolitical issues and that are not open to some foreign dictatorship. Dr Heath was espousing the values of North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Russia and China and saying that they are the ones to look to – absolutely right. My colleagues will attest to this. I could not believe my own ears. Check *Hansard*. That is who she was saying we should be looking to for energy. I disagree. We should be looking to generation right here. We should be looking to jobs right here – anti-inflationary. Let us guarantee the prices that we are paying for our energy with our security.

I look forward to this committee. I look forward to it in every single hearing we do. I look forward to it in its report, and I commend it and support it. Once again I will just say I am proud to be part of the Labor Party, which supports people to drive down their cost of living and puts real solutions to not only address cost of living but drive down emissions.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:02): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion, which is a referral motion to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into and report by 27 March 2026 on how Victoria can best harmonise electric vehicles with electricity supply and demand, including but not limited to a whole range of things.

Before I move on to that I just want to focus on the kombi van option, because it is actually quite interesting. I was researching while Mr McIntosh was doing a bit of waxing lyrical on this, but I have to say the kombi van that is available is a very nice modern take on the old-style kombi van. Did you know you can get a three-seat panel van and a five- or seven-seat people mover? A five- or seven-seat people mover is a perfect option for those opposite when they need to truck their people around Victoria, Mr McIntosh – it is absolutely perfect.

**Tom McIntosh:** They don’t need a big range to get between their seats.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** No, that’s right. I am pretty sure that the van would be perfect for shipping people around Victoria. Those in the Liberal Party could actually do their bit and seriously look into this as an option, because like I said, the EV kombi van is a thing and it is here to stay. I know it will be well taken up by those opposite, because it will be available in showrooms by Christmas this year, Mr McIntosh – just in time for Christmas. It will be very well received and something that people can absolutely look into.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** They could absolutely sit in one van, but whether they could stand to sit in one van together is another thing. It is a tad under \$80,000. They could all split the cost and chuck in together. That could be their new Liberal bus to get them around Victoria, and they can do their bit for driving down emissions.

EVs are here to stay, but I just really love the electric kombi van. I think that is amazing. What this debate has really been focusing on is how things change and how technology develops. The kombi van, as a car, is an icon in Australia. Everyone knows the old kombi van and has so many tales to tell about kombi vans: what has been done in kombi vans, where they have been, how they have been driven and who has driven them. But now we have this fantastic opportunity to relive and renew and regenerate all those fantastic stories with the electric kombi van. I look forward to the next generation of young drivers taking up the kombi van EV and getting out and about and perhaps going around Australia. You will be able to go to all these far-flung places because there will be charging stations in many places. You will be able to charge your electric kombi van, and it is going to be fantastic. Even in my local Woolworths down near where I live in Heidelberg, there are EV charging ports. So you can park your car, do your shopping down there and charge your car. It is fantastic. And like I

said, technology changes. You look at the old ‘dak dak’ kombi van, as we used to call it – the old ‘dak dak’ – and look at it now, 40 or 50 years later, and things change.

We have heard discussion today on this motion around how mobile phone technology has changed and vehicle technology and even Mr McIntosh talking about how he was an electrician and how they wire houses has changed. Things change. Nothing stagnates, and things do change. So if we are going to look at moving to electric vehicles and substantially increasing the uptake, of course there needs to be infrastructure to do that. Of course looking at removal of barriers and opportunities to manufacture, recondition and recycle EV batteries is an important thing. No matter what it is, with anything that operates with a battery – even mobile phone batteries, for example – there needs to be an important component of that which involves recycling, because all of these things create waste and they create carbon emissions as well. Whenever you manufacture something it creates carbon emissions. So there is always a check and a balance when you are talking about creating something new. We have heard a little bit about the nuclear debate here, and one of the challenges with nuclear was: what do we do with the waste? The waste is quite toxic with nuclear. It exists for many, many, many decades, and it is still a worldwide problem about what we do with the storage. There are methods to store it, but then there is debate about whether that is safe and has appropriate longevity and what you do when it becomes compromised. So there are all these new challenges. Whenever you look to having something new there are new problems to deal with.

But in any event the Victorian government have our zero-emissions vehicle (ZEV) road map, and we have been an early and strong supporter of the electric vehicle industry. Now, I have to say I am not like Mr McIntosh, who has been an early adopter, and I think Mr Welch has also said he has been an early adopter of EVs. I am not; I have a petrol car. I am doing my bit to burn up all the fossil fuel in my petrol car, which does not go down very well with people who do not like fossil fuels. But my position on EVs was that I would wait and see what happens with them. It is great if you want to be an early adopter and you have got money to do that and you want to work out how you charge it and all those sorts of things. I do not know, call me a bit old fashioned, but with all that technology and all the new Tesla vehicles that basically drive themselves, I do not like all the new bells and whistles on the new cars. Just give me an old-fashioned car any day, and I am happy to drive that. I do not want to deskill myself as a driver either. Basically, these things drive themselves these days. They pull you up if you are too close to a car, beep at you if you go over the lane line and all these sorts of things. But this is where technology is taking us, because obviously the next part is we will have driverless cars. We will have them everywhere. There are driverless cars already. You can see where this is all going with technology advances and changes and all the rest of it. These things are coming whether we like it or not. And I am sure there will be more EVs into the future but also driverless cars, trucks and the like. It is a bit scary, isn't it? I would like to drive my own car, but anyway, this is where we are going.

But back to EVs. In May 2021 the Victorian government released its zero-emissions vehicle road map, which sets out a pathway for net zero emissions in road transport. The road map included an ambitious target of 50 per cent of new light vehicle sales to be ZEVs by 2030. So in many ways our ZEV road map led the way for other jurisdictions, like the Commonwealth and other states, in support for ZEVs. The Economy and Infrastructure Committee is a busy committee, and I think this will probably get up. I think we are supporting this motion. The Greens are, obviously – it is their motion – so I am pretty sure it will get up. But again, it is looking at whether public charging infrastructure is being installed at a sufficient rate in parts of Victoria and older suburbs and those sorts of things. It is trying to ventilate and look at what the challenges are and perhaps roadblocks about how we can increase the uptake for it. But again, the private market plays a role in this. It is all very interesting to me that whenever there is a problem everyone knocks on government's door and goes, ‘Well, government, what are you doing about this?’ It is like, ‘Well, but hang on, there is a private market. This is actually a private market problem. Why don't you ask the private market to invest?’ And of course the private market will say, ‘Well, we want some clear signals about how we can invest.’

It is a problem, but if you look at other countries around the world, they have dealt with these problems as well. Again, the question has to be: why should government invest in something that really is a private situation, a private market problem? What return on investment would the government get from any of those sorts of things? We constantly get hammered by those opposite about what we are doing and what we are spending and whether we are getting return on investment and those sorts of things, but here we are having some sort of demand that we publicly fund electric vehicle charging stations. Did we ever publicly fund petrol stations? I do not know that we did. But anyway, it seems to be that as soon as there is a problem government is not doing enough – we should do more and we should absolutely fund things that we have really no basis or interest in doing.

It is all very nice if you can afford an EV. Like I said, most people at the moment cannot. They are quite expensive, but the costs are coming down. I spoke on this I think last year or maybe two years ago now, when we were talking about the EV tax. One of the things we wanted to do was to create a second-hand EV market. By doing that, what we did was, for our government fleet, we invested in EVs, and that means we can turn them over and therefore get more second-hand cars onto the market, which brings down the cost for people who might want to buy an EV.

Of course you can always ride a bike or catch public transport. If you really want to reduce your emissions, you can walk. There are all sorts of ways of reducing emissions. It looks like the clock is going to beat me on this, but as I said, we have got a very solid and strong road map about ZEVs. The government has been working consistently and hard on this, and of course we will not be opposing this motion.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:12): I would just like to make a very brief contribution on Ms Copsey's Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry recommendation, and I note that the Liberals and Nationals are not opposing this. I think there is some instructive information that could be gleaned from an inquiry, noting of course that our inquiries are forever under the pump and working to meet timelines.

One of the interesting things that this motion and the terms of reference do bring up is charging during peak periods. Those peak periods of course are generally in the morning or overnight or in the evening, when the sun has stopped shining, and that is placing extra demand on our grid. Naturally, in this state government's change to renewables – and of course we are not opposing renewables – what they have not done in the lead time, and they have botched it along the last 10 years, is provide that system stability and provide dispatchable and ongoing power. Of course these are issues when everybody plugs in the evening, in the dark, drawing down on the system. Then we hear the Greens and the minister from time to time also speak about the power stations and how aged and decaying they are, all whilst needing them to charge vehicles over peak periods in the evening. It would be interesting to actually investigate some of that and how we can reduce that strain on the energy supply system, noting that more and more people are going to solar panels for their homes. I think Australia has one of the highest take-ups of solar panels and photovoltaic cells in the world.

I do also want to look to point (2) of Ms Copsey's recommendations for the terms of reference, looking at public infrastructure being installed at a sufficient rate. She talked about the older suburbs in Melbourne, and I can understand that, because frequently houses are side to side and very densely packed and of course there is no off-street parking. I have friends who live in the city in those suburbs, and that makes it very difficult. What I would have liked to see in there as another inclusion are the regions and some of the issues that are facing early adopters or adopters of EVs in our regional areas and in fact in our remote areas.

I will give you an example of some of the charging deserts that we see in regional Victoria. My good colleague and friend Mrs Benham is talking very much about her electorate of Mildura, and wisely so, in terms of EV isolation. Indeed if you are a non-Tesla adopter, so you are not using the Tesla chargers, from Mildura you have to drive to Horsham to charge up your non-Tesla vehicle. To my mind, if I lived in Mildura, that would be preclusive. That is not going to encourage me to take up an EV. Indeed

if you go to my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region, if you are a non-Tesla car purchaser, Traralgon is the last station, the last place, the last town where you can charge. Let me say, from Traralgon to Omeo is a fair old distance. It also then starts to preclude people from visiting our regions and basking in the beauty of our regions and taking the opportunity to holiday there. You need a very long extension cord to get you up to Omeo from Traralgon, for example. We also see that the Great Ocean Road has very few and difficult charging stations over in Mrs McArthur's area.

**Bev McArthur:** We've got no power.

**Melina BATH:** That is it – and challenges with grids as well.

One of the other things that the NRMA spokesperson was speaking about recently was charger anxiety replacing range anxiety for the growing number of electric vehicle users relying on this slow infrastructure. It is about that rollout: the technology is there, the cars are there, but the charging stations are not.

We heard from Mr McIntosh only a few moments ago that he is an early adopter of an EV, and I think he was proudly saying how he needs to turn it over because it has now reached 50,000 kilometres on the odometer after 18 months. If I did a little survey of some of our National Party colleagues and some of our regional Liberal Party colleagues, we would double and treble that distance. I think my last clock was around 120,000 k's in 12 months, so clearly there is something wrong with me, because I am getting out and about in my electorate and visiting my electorate and I am wearing out my petrol-generated car. It is very good of Mr McIntosh to not drive too much and save the car, but these are still issues that we need to face.

The other thing that I did want to bring up, and it is quite interesting in that the government are spruiking their credentials in this space – and I remember it – is that only a few years ago the Victorian government introduced an electric vehicle charge, a road user charge. You are looking to ask people to adopt new and modern technologies and CO<sub>2</sub>-saving technologies, and then you go and tax them. We all know on this side that the government is in very high favour of taxing Victorians just about out of existence. We are up to the 60th – or coming up potentially tomorrow to the 61st – tax in terms of the fire services levy tax.

But finishing off on the discussion around the EV tax, we also know that the High Court in October 2023 ruled the Labor government's tax as unconstitutional, so there you are. It is quite interesting that these are some of the issues that the government benches are spruiking, but indeed they are not really encouraging those early adopters. With that, the Nationals do not oppose this inquiry.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:20): I have got a minute. This is a really important inquiry. Charging infrastructure for electric vehicles is one of the ingredients that we need to get right to help facilitate the adoption and uptake of electric vehicles in our state. Obviously parts of Southern Metropolitan have some of the highest current rates of electric vehicle adoption, and that follows an adoption curve that we saw particularly with things like rooftop solar. But I have got no doubt that, akin to the adoption curve of things like rooftop solar, they will spread more rapidly, particularly in outer suburban communities, when the infrastructure is there and the savings are there. The last thing I will say is just in response to Ms Bath. She was worried about getting from Traralgon to Omeo in an electric vehicle. If you are in a Tesla Model Y, you can drive there and back again without needing to charge.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:21): I just want to thank everybody who has contributed to the debate today. I think there have been a broad range of issues canvassed, which I think points to the worth of this inquiry. I thank everybody who has voiced their support. It looks as though the Economy and Infrastructure Committee is going to add this to its to-do list, and I really look forward to further exploring the issues that have been canvassed by members today.

In drafting the terms of reference we had the point at the end around ‘all relevant matters’, so I would think the point, for example, that was raised by Ms Bath around charging infrastructure being rolled out at a sufficient rate is actually covered. The reference to regional areas and charging deserts I would think fits within these terms of reference. But certainly it has been a really informative debate. I welcome everybody’s contributions on it and look forward to being part of this inquiry and the further consideration that the issues will get as part of that.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Victoria Planning Provisions**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:22): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that planning scheme amendments VC257 and VC267 change the Victoria Planning Provisions and that:
  - (a) planning scheme amendment VC257 was gazetted on 25 February 2025 and tabled in this house on 4 March 2025;
  - (b) planning scheme amendment VC267 was gazetted on 6 March 2025 and tabled in this house on 18 March 2025; and
- (2) pursuant to section 38(2) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, revokes amendments VC257 and VC267 to the Victoria Planning Provisions.

I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this debate. This is an important motion, and it is an important motion because it is about the future of our city. It is about the future of our state. We have very significant population growth. The state government has set dwelling targets – in my view unrealistic and unthoughtful dwelling targets – for many municipalities. Parallel with that, it has brought into place a series of planning scheme amendments, a veritable cavalcade of amendments that have come in quite quickly without proper discussion, without proper engagement with local communities and without proper engagement with the municipal bodies that have got the most important oversight over those pieces of land in our state.

The state government says that it wants to create more housing, and that is an agreed objective of all in this chamber, I think. Indeed it is an agreed objective certainly of all on the committee that recently looked at these planning scheme amendments. We do want to see more housing in this state, but the question is: will these planning scheme amendments achieve that housing, which would help in particular young people by providing more housing opportunities, or would it simply lead to a set of developments that are expensive homes that are not accessible to younger Victorians and homes that come at the expense of our municipalities and the heritage of our state? Much of the evidence we heard at the inquiry suggested it would also come at the expense of significant vegetation and tree canopy.

The truth of the matter here is that the economics is what has governed whether housing is available on one hand and the state government’s failure to bring forward a range of options that could have been brought forward has crimped the supply on the other. The state government, in a panic after almost 11 years in government, has now decided that there is not enough supply. To achieve more supply, they are now taking draconian, authoritarian steps and doing so in a way that is fundamentally at odds with our history in this state, fundamentally at odds with the understanding of how democracy should work and fundamentally at odds with good land use planning.

What the state government seeks to do through the three amendments was examined in the important inquiry – the short, sharp inquiry into VC257, VC267 and VC274 and in effect GC252 as well, which is an underpinning and a linchpin to implement many of the aspects in the other planning amendments – and what the inquiry heard was very convincing evidence that the government had not thought this through carefully. We heard convincing evidence that they had not properly engaged with each local council. We heard convincing evidence that they had not even engaged properly with the

standing advisory committee on activity centres. We heard convincing evidence that they had not understood what these changes could do to heritage. We heard convincing evidence that they had not understood what could happen with respect to tree canopy and vegetation and the quality of life and livability in many of our suburbs.

The state government has declared 10 large activity centres. These were in two parts: the central hub, where there has been longer term discussion with councils and communities, and which are in general much less contested; and the so-called walkable catchment or the transport zone or however it is described, a much larger penumbra around these centres, which was sprung on councils and communities late last year. Councils and communities were not provided the detail that is required. They were not provided the opportunity to consult and make different points about these matters. I say very clearly that the state government have overstepped the mark in this regard and that they have gone too far. The one purpose of the inquiry was to put a spotlight on these matters, and the inquiry certainly did bring a spotlight onto these matters. The committee, chaired by Mr Ettershank admirably, was a committee that looked at these things quite closely. We had three days of hearings, hundreds of submissions and detailed evidence from a range of planners as well – very experienced planners, who made it clear that the state government was fundamentally on the wrong track here.

Many of us understand the opportunities that are here for closer development, for more thoughtful density, but that is not what is being put forward with these amendments. It is not what the government has promulgated with these amendments. What the government has sought to do is to impose this and to press forward. Local communities are outraged. I know in my area, in Southern Metropolitan Region, I have closely engaged with my community across many of these activity centres – the 10 large ones and the larger number of 50 additional ones that are on the way as well. The state government has loaded many of them, let us be clear, into Liberal electorates. This is a political step. Let us also be clear that they are doing this in a way that will put at risk our livability and the quality of life in many of our suburbs.

What I think will occur is there will be a forced densification in an unsophisticated way. What we will see is a loss of vegetation, a massive clearance of vegetation and a clear-felling of massive areas of streetscape and the vegetation on private land. This will intensify massively with the arrangements available in 267 and the arrangements that will be oversighted in the activity centres by 257 and GC252. What will happen is where now a development might occur on a 1000- or 1200-square-metre block of land, all the trees will be cleared from that land. Overwhelmingly, what happens is a lot of the trees are cleared.

The state government is going to remove any leverage from councils and communities. The intention is very, very clearly to make sure that nobody can appeal and nobody can actually object, because a lot of this will be done as of right and a lot of this will be done where the ability to appeal even to VCAT is restricted to matters of, in the case of 267, whether the code assessment requirements have been met. It becomes a tick-a-box scheme with very sharply defined opportunities to develop, and if you tick those boxes, you can develop and off you go. The council and the community can have no say about a significant tree, about the tree canopy, about heritage. All of those matters are squarely in the gun from the government's perspective here.

It is true that there is no guarantee that major heritage-protected assets will be able to withstand the push here. There is no guarantee that heritage streetscapes will be protected in any way at all here. That is actually the truth of the matter, and that is very clear. I invite people to read Heritage Council Victoria's submission, which is attached to the minority report of the Liberals in this case, and also in the main report there are some quotes from the Heritage Council. Those quotes are very clear. It is very clear that the Heritage Council do not believe that the protections are sufficient – nor does the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, nor do many others who gave evidence to this inquiry.

The state government has sought to counterpose this and say, 'You can have more houses for young people, or those who are opposed to that would stop that.' Of course there is no such decision in this,



because the state government's proposal, on the one hand, will not deliver the choices for young people. They will not deliver the requirements. It is very clear that the taxation regime and the lack of land supply in many other areas will not allow the provision of sufficient properties coming through and will not provide the supply of land that is required. In our report we point out that there are alternative land options here. Working with councils in the activity centres, in these municipalities in the middle suburbs that the state government wants to target and wants to roll over, is the preferable way. We will get better outcomes, and each of the councils has actually developed plans for additional housing in their area, significant additional housing.

It is also true that the state government has missed many opportunities. We heard from the City of Casey, on the edge of the city, about the large precinct structure plan that has been drifting without support for seven years now; maybe 20,000 dwellings could come forward with that, with the proper support from state government and councils. At the same time we look at areas like Fishermans Bend, where the state government has drifted and been unable to bring to market opportunities in the area, where up to 80,000 dwellings could be sited. The state government has brought forward nothing in its 11 years in power – almost nothing.

One of the sites that we mentioned was the Maribyrnong site. There are clearly opportunities there. If the state –

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** It is Commonwealth land, and the Commonwealth should clean it. The Commonwealth, as a tenant that has left it in a dirty way, should clean it, and the Commonwealth should give it back to the state and allow whichever state government is in power to open up that land – 128 hectares.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** That is exactly right. The Commonwealth should fix it. The Commonwealth has left that despoiled, and it is actually disgraceful. If it was a private landowner, the EPA would have thrown the book at them. That is what would have happened. But because it is the Commonwealth, they all think they can just sit on it, and the truth is it should be a political campaign across this chamber to say, 'Clean the land and bring it back into state ownership.' We can build some public housing there. We can actually build additional housing. We can add parkland.

There are many opportunities across the city for a creative government to work with councils and communities to actually have more opportunities and more land and more dwellings come forward, which will assist not just young people but everyone. That is what we have got to do. The solution here is not overriding councils, it is not overriding communities, it is actually working with them. It is working with them; that is what we have got to be doing here. It is very clear that in the middle suburbs, which the state government wants to target, there are many planning permits that have been provided which have not been actioned – thousands and thousands across the middle-ring suburbs, tens of thousands of permits that have not been actioned.

It is the economics behind this that have made it unsuccessful in terms of new developments coming forward, so the economics have also got to be dealt with. We actually need to make sure that the state government brings some of the tax off these things. Tax is a big part of it. There is no question that the property industry is correct when it says that more than 40 per cent of the cost of a new dwelling coming onto market is actually tax; huge amounts of taxation are incorporated in the cost of housing. If you make housing unaffordable, it is actually hard to bring forward a supply in the volume that is needed for those, particularly for younger people, who would seek to buy that housing, so we need to have some of the taxation reduced on some of our key sites.

The state government in the last day has announced that they are going to give another one year for the off-the-plan exemption. The off-the-plan exemption was a very helpful way of kicking things

forward. For history reasons I pulled out the 1994 news release from then Treasurer Stockdale, who announced an off-the-plan scheme and actually did not limit it to one year. This government limited it to one year, and now they have extended it for a second year. So you have got this piecemeal approach, and the development industry of course are not going to be able to bring forward what is required there.

When you think about affordable housing, the state government has not got the proper plans in place for affordable housing – to get the outcomes that are required there – either. So we say the state government has got this wrong. We say that instead of rolling over councils and communities the state government should step back. These revocations are an opportunity for them to look at this afresh and to work with councils and communities. We do not need a one-size-fits-all approach right across the state. What we actually want is a particularised approach where you actually work with councils and communities in particular areas. They are all different – they have different solutions – but in most of these areas there are tracts of land that can be brought to market, there are tracts of land that can be developed, there are tracts of land that are appropriate for affordable housing as well. All of that should occur.

The truth of the matter is that a revocation is a very clear signal, and the point is –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Acting President, on a point of order, could we just have a little bit of silence? Is that possible?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I uphold that point of order. Mr Davis to continue unassisted.

**David DAVIS:** I have only got a minute or so left to go, but I want to say that we did not come lightly to this position of seeking to revoke these planning amendments. We think that actually that is the least preferable way, but the state government appear intransigent, and it seems to be the only way that we can send a signal to the community and to the government that many in the chamber and many in the community are not happy with the approach they have adopted. Either house alone, in the Planning and Environment Act 1987, retains the power to revoke in whole or in part planning scheme amendments. Five of those have happened since 2009. These are important steps, and on some occasions the government of the day has actually worked with councils and communities to deliver a better outcome after a revocation, and that could happen here.

I would encourage the government to actually work with councils and communities to find particular solutions in each individual area where there is more opportunity for housing to come forward but so that that is done in a way that respects the vegetation. For goodness sake, we have got a city that is getting more dense and we have got enormous population growth, and of course if you tear down tracts of trees – and heritage trees at that – you actually end up with more concrete, more brick and more heat. This is not a sensible way to go forward. At the same time we have got major heritage assets that are at risk, and these will be rolled over under the government's current proposals – the Heritage Council makes that clear. There will be destruction. Melbourne will be vandalised. We will lose our Marvellous Melbourne, and that is an outrage.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:42): I am pleased to rise to speak on this motion. Having spent quite a while with Mr Davis recently as a member of the select committee inquiring into the planning scheme amendments that are the subject of this revocation motion, it is quite clear that he is passionate about this. It is quite clear that he has some pretty clear views about what he wants to see. In his contribution today he spoke about the future of our city and the future of our state. I want us in this debate to think about not only our city and our state but the future of Victorians – the future of people who actually live here or want to live here – because planning is not about buildings, it is not about walls, it is not about surfaces; it is about people and how people can live in communities that they love and how people can find a home near their family, near where they went to school, near their communities, near their sporting clubs, so that they can spend more time in

the places that make them happy and less time commuting 20, 30, 40 minutes on a Sunday to catch up with their parents for lunch. That is what we should remember as being the most important part of a debate about planning rules. Yes, it is important that we listen to the planners and the planning experts and that we listen to municipal authorities, but we have got to remember why we are doing it. Why we are doing it is to give more Victorians, particularly younger Victorians, the opportunity to own a home in the communities that they grew up in and that they want to spend their time in.

We are living in a world where young Victorians in particular are being locked out of the housing market, and we know that one of the biggest barriers that we have got to building more homes for Victorians is our planning rules, and we need to change that. Driving that change has been the heart of the Allan Labor government's housing agenda. The planning rules, the planning amendments and the planning changes that are the subject of this revocation and that were the subject of the committee inquiry are one of the mechanisms that we have. They will not solve the problem on their own, but they are an important ingredient, and they are an important foundation in delivering that policy goal of making sure that more Victorians have an opportunity to call Victoria home.

There are a couple of specifics in the context of Mr Davis's contribution that I want to get to. He talked a little bit about the economics of this – and I will come to that – and he talked a little bit about tree canopy and vegetation. I do think, despite its limitations in terms of the length of time that we had, our select committee did have quite an engaged and thoughtful process in examining some of these issues. I do thank the chair Mr Ettershank for the way he conducted this inquiry under some short timeframes and the other members of the committee for the way that we all, I hope, conducted ourselves to try to get to some of these questions. One of them was this issue of tree canopy and vegetation – that came up as being one of the issues. Legitimate concerns were raised about the application of the new rules.

I think it is important to see these planning scheme amendments in the context of the broader *Plan for Victoria* that we have and the minister has released. *Plan for Victoria* sets a 30 per cent tree canopy target right across our urban areas, including on both public and private land. So in the Townhouse and Low-rise Code, VC267, we have set a new standard through this code for tree canopy coverage on new projects assessed under this particular planning pathway. But we are also going to protect significant trees that are over 5 metres tall by requiring a planning permit so that existing trees will be protected and added to our canopy target, and we will also continue to support the cooling and greening Melbourne initiative, the metropolitan urban forest strategy, the More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West program and the suburban parks program, which is planting hundreds of thousands of trees across metropolitan Melbourne. There is much more to do to make sure that Melbourne retains its tree canopy and retains its vegetative cover, and we are going to be working nonstop with councils, industry and other important stakeholder groups to achieve our 30 per cent tree canopy target. It was one of the critical issues that was raised in the course of the inquiry and is something the government acknowledges, and I hope that contribution helps address some of the concerns that were raised in the course of the inquiry on that question.

I want to come briefly to this point about economics that Mr Davis raised, because he said that there was a problem with the economics that underpin this. All we heard from the economists who appeared at our inquiry was that the benefits of these changes in terms of the transformation of the economics of development were significant. I do not want to quote at length people from the Grattan Institute or the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia as just one, but it was very clear. What CEDA said in particular and what the Housing Industry Association and developers said in particular was that one of the big issues with the economics of bringing more houses to market is that time is cost in development. The extra time that is taken through the way the planning scheme operates is increasing the costs of development due to holding costs. Appeals and the way that decisions can take extended periods of time, largely to get to, in many instances, very similar decisions, are some of the key drivers of the cost of housing development in this state, and in terms of providing more consistency and more certainty over the rules that apply right across the metropolitan area, the evidence that our committee heard was that that will help increase the productivity of the construction sector with respect

to these new homes and that both the scale and the certainty should help put downward pressure on those costs. That is the economics that we are talking about here.

We do not have, sadly, a lot of time to go through all of the issues individually, about what was raised and some of the issues that are here. It is pretty clear that our housing agenda and these critical planning reforms are the change that we need to help deliver for more Victorians. But like all good approaches to public policy they are not and should not be ‘set and forget’. This is always – always – going to be an iterative process, and it is going to be crucial as these planning reforms roll out to keep reviewing, checking in and evolving over time to make sure that our reforms are working as they are intended. The government is very clear on this point: where we need to make changes, we will. That is why we have already set up the technical working groups to help design the reforms, and we are going to use them – we are using them – to continue to ensure that the reforms that we have enacted are operating as they are intended. That is how we approach good public policy in this state, and that is exactly the approach that the government is taking here. We have been engaging with councils since these reforms were first announced in September 2023. More than 18 months later, that engagement continues.

To come back to the original point, these reforms are about making sure that more Victorians have the opportunity to have a home in the communities they love, to be close to their families, to be close to the schools where they went to school so that their kids can go to school there as well and to be close to the community groups that they are a part of. These changes help give them that opportunity, and that is exactly why the government is wholeheartedly supporting them today.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (15:53): Let me be clear at the outset: the Greens support the government’s vision for more housing, for more affordable housing and for increased density close to infrastructure and services. It just makes sense. We also recognise that there are many aspects of the planning system that could be improved, including to achieve these aims. We are not alone in supporting these things. Councils, planning experts and a substantial proportion of the community do as well, as was highlighted in the recent select committee inquiry. However, the planning scheme amendments that are the subject of this motion do have some serious problems, which I will go on to highlight.

Before that, I want to state that revocation is not going to solve these problems, as much as I know many members in here perhaps, and certainly in the community, hoped that they would. Revocation as a tool is a very blunt instrument; it is like one big eraser. Unlike a piece of legislation coming before the Parliament, there is no opportunity to amend or replace things with preferred options. There is simply no nuance. Not everything about these planning changes necessarily deserves to be revoked. Further, and perhaps most importantly, revocation does not mean that the government will go back to the drawing board, suddenly realise the error of its ways and come up with something better or different. In fact we have been advised that they would simply reintroduce the same planning scheme amendments immediately. Again, unlike legislation, there is nothing in revocation of regulation that compels the government to do anything differently. This presents the possibility of perpetual cycles of gazettal and revocation, which I do not think anyone would believe suits anyone’s interests. So we will not be supporting this motion, despite having a lot of sympathy for the reasons that it came about.

The select committee inquiry that was recently held – an inquiry process that the Greens strongly supported and participated in – shone a spotlight on some of the most significant planning changes this state has seen. What we learned through the process is that consultation with core stakeholders was dismal. Community members who participated in the various so-called engagement sessions felt that they were tokenistic. What was especially concerning was the failure to properly consult with those who are required to administer the planning system – namely, local councils and expert planners. For example, with respect to VC267, also referred to as the townhouse code, councils and independent planning experts did not learn of an extensive list of very consequential exemptions until after the planning scheme amendment was gazetted.

These ResCode changes essentially create a tick-a-box list of requirements that a development must meet, and if they do, they are considered deemed to comply and a council must issue a permit. Such developments are exempt from considering local policies, like environmentally sustainable design requirements, vegetation and tree canopy policies and known flood risks that have not had overlays finalised. They are also exempt from key requirements of the Environment and Planning Act 1987, like having to consider significant environmental or social impacts of a development. These local planning policies and the requirements under the act exist for a reason. They have evolved over a long period of time to reduce risks to human health and the environment of developments, as well as to ensure better development outcomes for communities. There is widespread concern about the impact of these pretty extraordinary exemptions, including potentially unintended consequences.

Since VC267 also exempts relevant developments from third-party appeal rights, ensuring that these changes are thoroughly consulted on and broadly agreed upon by councils and communities prior to their implementation should have been essential. That this was not done is a significant failure on the part of the government. We believe that it is possible to streamline planning processes without losing community say – for example, by having some deemed-to-comply provisions which are developed by the local councils and communities themselves. We urge the government to commit to a review of these planning scheme amendments, particularly VC267, in consultation with councils and communities and to amend them based on the feedback received. I was heartened to hear from Mr Batchelor that the government does not see these changes as set and forget and does intend to continue to consult. We will have to see in the fullness of time whether that is the case.

We are also very concerned about the failure of these changes to ensure that we have climate-resilient housing and communities. As the climate warms we need to ensure more climate-resilient housing, both at the individual housing and building level, and in terms of the broader urban landscape. This is not only important for people's health and comfort; it is also important for people's cost of living. Running an energy-inefficient house costs a lot. So much of the existing housing stock in Victoria is, quite frankly, appallingly built for our existing climate. We have leaky, poorly oriented housing made of poor materials. It is freezing in winter and stifling in summer. Individuals and governments are spending a fortune trying to retrofit them to improve efficiency. Why on earth wouldn't we take the opportunity to get it right at the planning stage?

VC267 effectively reduces the existing environmentally sustainable design standards in the local government areas that cover about two-thirds of Victoria's population and two-thirds of Victoria's development activity. Add to that the potential that the new ResCode creates the potential for old-school moonscaping, which is where developers just clear blocks of all trees and vegetation, and we are possibly setting up our state to have hotter houses in hotter streets through these planning scheme amendments. I would strongly recommend the blog of Stephen Rowley, a planning expert who presented at the inquiry, to understand the impact of these changes on tree canopy and vegetation.

Additionally, the planning changes fail to take into account infrastructure provision and future requirements beyond major transport access – for example, schools and healthcare facilities – as they override much of the strategic planning undertaken by councils to determine the most appropriate locations for new housing and do not include a requirement to ensure appropriate sequencing of infrastructure and housing delivery. Once again we urge the government to take on board the feedback from the inquiry, review these planning scheme amendments and ensure that we are not locking generations of people into housing that is costly to run, poorly designed and lacking access to essential local infrastructure.

Finally, these changes are also a huge missed opportunity to deliver more affordable housing. Despite the accompanying rhetoric, these planning reforms are not an affordable housing strategy. We heard plenty of evidence, including from the housing and development industry themselves, questioning whether the changes would even deliver more supply, let alone more affordable supply, especially for those on low and very low incomes. Planning levers can be used to deliver affordable housing, like having mandatory requirements for proportions of social or affordable housing in all new

developments. With the right settings this can be a very effective strategy, and it is one that has long been advocated for by those working in housing and homelessness support services as well as unions.

In the inquiry we heard some evidence of a concept called filtering, which is where higher income households buy newer, more expensive housing, leaving older, cheaper housing for those on lower incomes to buy. Eventually everyone gets a house they can afford under this theory. It is a bit like trickle-down economics; we will call it trickle-down housing. While there is some evidence that was provided from overseas contexts that this may occur, in the Australian context there is very little evidence to support this notion, and that is partly due to some really important contextual differences, including the fact that a lot of old stock in Australia gets renovated or rebuilt. Curiously, a paper highlighting this lack of evidence was provided by the Department of Transport and Planning themselves in response to a question on notice that I asked about evidence the government had relied upon to support their claims of affordability.

We are in a housing crisis, and the government should be pulling every lever available to it to address this. These planning changes could have been one such lever, and we ask the government to urgently revise the planning scheme amendments to provide certainty in terms of affordability outcomes rather than relying on the market alone to deliver this.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:02): I rise to speak in support of Mr Davis's motion that he has brought before the house today in relation to planning scheme amendments VC257 and VC267, which change the Victorian planning provisions. As has been outlined by Mr Davis, these will have significant impacts to the community, and especially to the community that both Mr Davis and I represent, and Mr Batchelor, who has spoken against this. I think it is shameful that he was saying, 'Trust us, we're the government; we'll get it right.' Well, I will go to that point about how wrong he will be, given the evidence that we heard through the inquiry and given this track record of Labor. I mean, they fail on so many aspects of poor governance and on sending this state into a very bad position economically in so many areas. But I will not go off on a tangent and speak about that, because I do not have enough time. I want to stick to what this issue is about – these amendments.

As Mr Batchelor was speaking in his contribution he was saying, 'We'll be consulting with councils and getting it right.' I have just heard Dr Mansfield say the same thing. I am disappointed that she is not supporting this, given her commentary in the committee and her commentary in the chamber just now about how important it is to get it right and the concerns we heard from many witnesses. If you look back at what was said in the actual inquiry, I want to go back to the Municipal Association of Victoria's (MAV) evidence. They gave excellent evidence as witnesses and spoke about their role. They are the overarching body for local councils, and obviously there are many councils that have raised concerns around the government's approach. But in their evidence they stated:

The MAV has closely followed the development of amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274 and their effects on the planning system, councils and our local communities.

They went on to say they support the objectives of the government, as do we all in terms of getting more housing to assist Victorians to be able to live in. As I have heard government members say, living in dignity and having their own house – we all want that objective; we all agree with that objective, and we all want to see more housing. But these amendments do not actually provide certainty for the communities that are there. I was just speaking to Mr Davis before around Forest Hill. If you look at Forest Hill in the Toorak–South Yarra area, it does not have the services. There is no park. Metro Tunnel does not even connect to South Yarra train station.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Mr Batchelor, the point is that there is a significant amount of densification in areas right across your and my electorate, and what we are concerned about with these amendments is further densification, as we see in those areas where heritage and amenity are reduced.

I want to go on. The MAV, in their very extensive and good evidence to the committee, spoke about unintended consequences. In fact they said there were eight unintended consequences. The first one:

... we think the code will actually incentivise the excessive removal of existing vegetation.

And they go on:

... the code will produce materially lower environmental sustainable development standards in 28 local government areas because it switches off the local policies that they already have in place around ESD standards.

Another area that they pointed out was around the speculative appeal rights, which will create inefficiency in councils and erode trust amongst third parties. I mean, these are not said lightly. This is the MAV pointing out their concerns.

The seventh point –

they say –

is that many existing local planning scheme amendments will be void. Local code makes local policies and some elements of local schedules to residential zones irrelevant ...

And then they go on about the deemed-to-comply approach, which we heard a lot about in the inquiry. They talk about how ‘deemed to comply’ will require that councils will have to ‘tolerate a lower quality of design’. Why would we want to reduce quality in design? Somebody interrupted and said, ‘Well, there have been failures in the past where dogboxes were built,’ and we do not want this to occur across communities where the amenity and services are not provided.

Again, another issue around what we heard throughout the inquiry was around the consultation – the lack of consultation. It was very selective consultation, and there are many gaps there and a lot of people were watching what was going on, and I think they were dismayed because of the failures and the spin from government members and what was presented by department officials. The MAV’s evidence went on to talk about:

The standing advisory committees were established within Planning Panels Victoria for each of the 10 pilot activity centres ...

But they say that the information that was shared with them was limited. I am just reading this:

... while councils were able to make submissions to those committees, it was done so with limited information available and limited time made.

They say it was done ‘behind closed doors’. That is the extent of what the government has gone to here. When MAV are putting this evidence to our inquiry to say, ‘Well, this was the consultation process,’ I think it is shameful that the government members come in here and say, ‘Trust us, we’re working with council,’ when council have said all along that they did not get it right, they did not get the consultation process right and there were so many issues. As one witness said, and I am going to quote this:

‘Once you make a decision and it gets built with planning, it’s incredibly hard to undo’ ...

That was what they were taught at university, and he is quite right in terms of this planning process.

We have it as a profession to make sure that the right outcomes and that good planning outcomes are made in the first instance. That is why our submission and work we have done on what we would like to see in terms of legislative change calls for a better process to make sure that those designing the system are working well with those administering the system to make sure that we do not end up living with long-term outcomes that are undesirable for communities and therefore undoing the social licence of the need to build more housing in our housing crisis.

That sums it all up.

**A member** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** It is not a laughing matter.

A member interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, I am glad you are not laughing at that, because it is very serious what we are discussing here about the impacts to local community, whether it is amenity, whether it is the tree canopy removal or whether it is the lack of consultation and the lack of engagement with local councils, who have got expertise in this area and yet we have got a government that is just ramming this through. This will have a massive impact on communities, and I have not got time to go through Heritage Council Victoria's submission, but again they talk about the inadequacy of consultation. They are scathing about where they fitted into the thing.

**David Davis:** They were not briefed until 1 May.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, they say:

... the Council was not contacted or consulted at any stage in the preparation of the three amendments.

You cannot try and even believe the government when they say, 'Trust us, we'll get this right,' because time and time again when the bodies that are at stake here, who are speaking in good faith, have wanted to have some input, they have been disregarded, they have been brushed over and so has the community. I think it is absolutely shameful that unfortunately those that were on the committee who heard all this evidence, who agreed with the evidence and who have got concerns about the evidence are not supporting this important motion.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:11): We have a housing crisis in this nation, a housing challenge, for young people in particular. For people in my generation it has been extremely hard to buy a home – it still is for many. For people in the next generation it is even harder, and I do not know how many of them will be able to do it. For generations, year after year, decade after decade, we have had report and strategy and outline and vision of the need to do things better. All the while we have had these wonderful ideas and the status quo has remained. This is a government that is actually doing something about it.

*Plan for Victoria* is one of the longest consultation processes, the most expansive consultation processes, in this state's history. Through it we have a series of planning amendments which change the Victoria Planning Provisions by actually taking meaningful action. Because doing nothing, doing the same as what we have done for so long, is not going to deliver genuine housing options for young people. It is not going to deliver genuine housing affordability. There are many factors at play. There are many factors outside the state's control. Planning is clearly within the state's control. As expert evidence to this committee and outside showed, such as the Grattan Institute's research, the single biggest blocker for changing this system is planning. We need to take meaningful action. That is exactly what these three VPP amendments do. The alternative is not an option. It is not an option for us; apparently it is for those opposite. It is the ultimate expression of a 'We've got ours, stuff you' attitude and that mentality that we see from the Liberal Party.

There are so many people who are struggling to find a house, to buy a house. Now, that is not in any way to discount genuine local concerns where they arise. I would note, amongst other things, that the heritage overlays that already exist are not in any way changed by these amendments. But we are not providing genuine choice. We are putting more and more pressure on the outer suburbs to absorb this state's population growth. They are growing at a hugely fast rate, at a very fast rate. I am proud to represent one such region in the outer suburbs. It is a great place to live. People should have the choice to live there, but they should also have the choice to live in inner-city Melbourne. They should have the choice to live in the middle suburbs or indeed regional Victoria. For too many, there is no choice at all.

The alternatives put forward today by Mr Davis were Fishermans Bend and Maribyrnong. He has not given us a plan for transport links in Fishermans Bend, just 'You can put all the housing there.' Never



mind that that is going to be nowhere near enough to accommodate the population growth that we are expecting – nowhere near enough – with no transport plan for that location either.

The disgraceful circumstance in which the Liberal Party has sought to put the motion before this house today is as transparent as it is disgraceful in fact. It is a foregone conclusion. We had a committee inquiry that was established the day after this very motion was read in. We know what their preferred outcome was: all that they wanted from this committee was to seek, to provide, to fabricate a justification for what they already knew that they wanted to do.

Let me be very, very clear on this point, because it is important to note in the context of what is a very large debate: the upper house has the power to revoke planning amendments because they operate, effectively, as subsidiary legislation. It has been used rarely in the past in a very localised setting. This motion before us today, if it were to proceed, would be by far the most significant, the most destructive, the most wide-ranging revocation motion in this state's history, and a six-week inquiry – and I will make the point again that it was very well chaired, and I very much appreciate the support of the staff as well – is completely insufficient to make that determination, even if it did support revocation, which it did not. The report does not support revocation. For a party which is accusing an 18-month consultation process of being insufficient to then suggest that six weeks is enough is quite frankly farcical. To provide people with six business days to put submissions in to this inquiry is outrageous – and again, that is no reflection the stewardship of the inquiry.

We know that groups such as YIMBY Melbourne, who have campaigned to address this imbalance, have repeatedly said how people who are facing housing stress, who are having those difficulties in getting into the housing market, often do not have the time or the resources to front up to council planning hearings. They do not have much time to participate in this either. Despite that, we saw an overwhelming theme in the submissions that came through – almost all that I could tell of the submissions that referenced young people or people who were themselves young or had kids. In one case there was a very touching story: he wanted his kids to grow up so they would be able to live nearby and they could catch up socially at the pub or wherever else and still have that regular contact. People that mentioned those concerns were overwhelmingly in favour of these VPP amendments.

We had many submissions from many experts and academics and the like. On this side I am very happy to amplify that we also had a very strong submission from the Labor for Housing group, and I acknowledge their work and advocacy in this space. In fact one such thing was discussing the demonisation of density, which felt all the more appropriate given the curious picture that the Liberal Party decided to put on the cover of its minority report. I am not sure if you know what city it is, if any of the Liberal members happen to know.

**David Limbrick** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** I think it is Athens, Mr Limbrick, but I am not sure if the Liberal Party members themselves actually know that. On the other side of the house we actually have seen, in light of this inquiry, a group form, a Liberals for Housing group. It is sadly not represented by any of their members in this place but a group that is fed up with their elected representatives ignoring their views and ignoring the fact that their party once used to claim to stand for aspiration for all Australians and actually speaking up to this inquiry as well. Perhaps not surprisingly, but disappointingly, you will not find their voice echoed in the Liberals' minority report, nor indeed in any of their members statements in the chamber today. But I am happy to, in some spirit of bipartisanship, acknowledge that there are still some members of the Liberal Party prepared to speak up for providing aspiration and choice for future generations of Victorians, even if those voices are not being represented by their MPs.

In putting this motion forward today, the Liberal Party have made their views clear to a whole generation of Victorians that they are not interested in giving them a choice, that they are not interested in them having the same rights and opportunities that their parents' and their grandparents' generations had before them. That generation will rightly damn you for it. But on this side of the house we are

proud to support meaningful measures that make a real difference to providing more housing options for more Victorians. This is a condemnable motion. I do not support it.

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (16:20): I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the debate on motion 905, moved by Mr Davis. I do not intend to re prosecute the arguments within the committee but rather to consider the motion in the context of the committee's findings. Mr Galea nailed it: the committee did not recommend that the amendments be disallowed. What the committee did – and I remind members that the majority report was unanimously supported – was to objectively and carefully consider the amendments, their intent and their possible effects. That is the process I tried to guide the committee through as chair, and that is the basis on which Victorians gave evidence.

If I can summarise the findings as succinctly as possible, it would be to say that in relation to VC257 the committee found significant problems with the quality of the consultation with communities, councils and the appointed expert panel, but that:

... the controls introduced by VC257 have the potential to give proper effect to the objectives depending on how their local schedules are drafted and where they apply.

The committee made a very clear recommendation that the government review the expert advisory mechanism and consultation methods with planning experts, local councils and communities for the first 10 activity centres and make improvements about both in relation to the next 50 activity centres. The government and opposition members on the committee both supported that finding and that resolution, and I am sure that we all expect that the recommendation will be acted upon.

In relation to amendment VC267 the committee again found significant problems with the quality of the consultation with communities and councils and found that there are risks of unintended consequences. The committee recommended that the government make improvements to the new townhouse and low-rise code introduced under amendment VC267, including by reinstating the clause 65 decision-making guidelines, which are a safeguard that allows decision-makers – for example, council planners – to consider evidence about the risk of floods, fires and other hazards.

Other recommended improvements were to add a landscaping standard and improve the tree cover canopy standard to avoid excessive tree removal and to lift the environmentally sustainable development standards up to the level previously found in 28 local government areas where those standards have been lowered by the code. But the committee did not recommend wholesale revocation. The code can be improved while it is in effect, and again I expect that these recommendations will be acted on. But just as the committee did not recommend that these amendments be revoked, nor did it find that the amendments are satisfactory as they are – far from it. As I have pointed out, the committee found some very significant problems. Revocation is not the only tool for fixing these problems, but these problems are going to have to be fixed, and the committee has provided the government with a practical path to fixing them.

I say to the government as diplomatically as I can: winning the motion in this chamber today does not itself fix the problems with the amendments, nor does it fix the government's broader problem, which is the erosion of public trust in the planning system and in the government caused by clumsy planning reform. This is not a simplistic YIMBY versus NIMBY war, as the government would have it. The committee heard overwhelming evidence from members of the public, from planning professionals and from local governments that there is widespread support for the government's aim for very significant infill development. They just want to make sure that it is done well, because our town, our city, is littered with examples of failed planning exercises; that new homes come with basic infrastructure; that it manages flood risk; that it includes affordable dwellings; and that homes are designed to be energy efficient and do not cost a fortune to cool in summer or to heat in winter. These are all reasonable expectations which are not currently met by the standards.

The government can dismiss all of this if it wants and lump all critics of its planning reform agenda as barriers to progress, but how sustainable is that? How will Victorians embrace the housing infill

objectives of the government – and those are objectives which I support, too – if the planning system is designed to stop them having a say about the future of the communities that they live in or if the supposed consultation on planning scheme amendments is so poor that participants make their minds up that the government does not actually want to hear from them at all? Does the government stand behind the words in today's *Age* article that:

The committee, which looked into three major planning amendments brought in by Labor, was dubbed a "sham inquiry" by the government, which claimed the Liberals were trying to block building more homes.

A sham inquiry – seriously, is that really the government's position?

I would just like to note for the record that Dr Mansfield and I – and I would like to commend Dr Mansfield on her comments previously in this debate – put a proposal to both the government and the opposition that the motion before the chamber be set aside and that instead we resolve, firstly, to switch back on clause 65 of the planning design guidelines. This would allow councils to at least consider issues such as environmental hazards, public health and maintaining environmentally sustainable design standards – considerations that the planning scheme amendments currently preclude. Secondly, we asked that the Minister for Planning agree to meet with key stakeholders such as the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Planning Institute of Australia to consider key issues of concern identified by the select committee in its report. To our very profound disappointment, both the government and the opposition rejected this modest compromise, this simple path forward.

So there is still a lot of work to do. I imagine there will be plenty more Victoria Planning Provisions amendments coming down the line. I imagine there will also be some reforms to the act. Whether those reforms are designed to smash through or whether they are done in a way that generates public confidence is entirely up to the government. So far we have seen a lot of the former, and I hope we start seeing some of the latter. Legalise Cannabis will not be supporting this motion for the reasons I have outlined. That said, simply defeating this motion and branding anyone who expresses concern as a NIMBY will not insulate the government from further revocations and opposition in the future.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (16:27): I thank Mr Ettershank (1) for his contribution and (2) for his very capable chairing of this select committee inquiry. It was not perhaps easy, and he did an excellent job. I thank other members of the committee who appeared in the inquiry: Dr Mansfield, who was very erudite in her contribution and also during the committee stages, and my colleagues Mr Davis and Ms Crozier. But, Mr Ettershank, I will take issue with you. I do think you are very naive – naive in the extreme in fact – to think that the government will fix the multitudes of problems that you have so correctly identified. I like your level of optimism, but I think you are naive. They would have fixed them by now if they were going to. There will be nothing fixed, Mr Ettershank, I am sorry to tell you.

Mr Galea said aspects of this housing crisis were outside Labor's control. Mr Galea, the vast majority of problems with housing in this state are right within your bailiwick. Forty per cent of the cost of a dwelling is incurred with your taxes – 15 taxes on developers, especially the windfall gains tax, which is not hypothecated, which goes into consolidated revenue. That is the sort of tax that could be providing the infrastructure required around housing developments. But no, you want to put it into consolidated revenue to solve your black hole. The housing crisis has been totally created by you, and you are responsible for this housing crisis. And this 'Look at me, look at me – we're doing something about housing' little thought bubble is not going to solve the problem. We heard on the inquiry that this will not deliver one cheaper house. Not one affordable house will be delivered, let alone the social housing that especially the Greens and the Legalise Cannabis Party are so concerned about – not one will be delivered.

This attack on local government as the major problem in delivering housing in this state is absolutely criminal. Many of those councils that we heard from have approved hundreds and hundreds of developments, resulting in thousands of potential dwellings. But what is happening? No developer is going to put a spade in the ground because the cost of the end product will not be affordable to anybody

in the marketplace. You have ensured there is a housing crisis, and you are riding roughshod over the community and over the citizens in these suburbs and throughout Victoria and over councils with this demand that they build X number of houses in the most ridiculous places. There is no proper consultation. Your consultation is a tick-a-box exercise. Many of the councils found out about these things 24 hours before you gazetted them – outrageous performance. You obviously hate democracy. You do not want to have any level of consultation with the public. You do not want elected councillors and elected representatives to have a say. You are despicable in the way you go about things.

Taxation is one aspect of the housing crisis. Another aspect is the extraordinary cost these days of doing any sort of development in building in this state, because you have soaked up all the builders and workers in this state in your out-of-control, overpriced and overtime projects. Why are you leaving, Mr Galea? You clearly do not like what you are hearing.

**Michael Galea:** I'll be back in 1 minute.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Oh, good. So it becomes impossible to build anything in this state because of the cost of employment and the lack of builders that are available because of your huge infrastructure projects, which are out of control. The taxpayers are paying the price, totally.

It is quite extraordinary that you think it is okay to run completely roughshod over the concerns of a community. It is unbelievable that you in the Labor Party would think this is acceptable – that people should not be able to put in a claim against a proposal that is occurring. Thank you for coming back, Mr Galea. It is wonderful to see you. This this is extraordinary. Now people will not even be able to go to VCAT to put in a complaint about something.

I cannot believe also that the Greens would think that it is okay to destroy trees – destroy tree canopy on a massive scale. I thought you loved trees, you people, but no. You might plant a few somewhere else, but right where you are going to have these tall towers – they are not activity centres, they are not Pilates studios or playgroups for children; these are tall towers that you are proposing – there will be no trees. It will be a cement desert. That is what you are proposing. And you know what, we heard from developers that this is going to be marvellous because we will be able to have a proforma building that we will cut and paste everywhere. We will have dogboxes of uniform size and shape and look across the suburbs of Melbourne. You will destroy the amenity of these suburbs that Melbourne is so famous for. And of course we know you hate history, so anything to do with history is a problem. Heritage is out the door. You do not care about history and heritage in this state; you just have no interest in that whatsoever. It is extraordinary that you think this is so important and the minister thinks this is so important, but she was not even prepared to come and justify her existence and justify her plans to the committee.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** She did not even have a good excuse, Mr Davis tells us. Talk about a lack of transparency. We asked for particular documents from the department. They were not forthcoming. There is no transparency. There is a lack of democracy on your side of the chamber. As a result there will not be one new house for all these young people that you claim you are representing, Mr Galea. They will not be able to afford any of these buildings, and we were told that in the inquiry. You are running a dictatorship clearly over the top of the community and over the top of the people of Victoria. And you know what, you are in collusion with three big developers as well. Small developers will not get a look-in in this scenario. You are working with the three biggest developers in this state, and that is shameful. It is an oligopoly situation you are operating here, and that is appalling. This is also, I would contest, a social engineering gerrymandering exercise – nothing less. It is socialism on a large scale. You are relocating people to areas that you currently may not control in the hope that you can move tens of thousands of people into electorates where you might control them.

And you know what, Mr Galea talked about being able to have a choice of where you go. A young person should be able to have a choice – of course they should. But do you know what? Children and

young people in the country do not often get a choice. Right now you are soon – or hopefully never – going to impose the most egregious tax on people in the country of all time. That will drive young people away from their areas, away from their homes and away from their communities because there will be no jobs left. There will be no farms left if you keep continuing wanting to tax people out of existence, especially the people that feed you and the people that deliver goods inside the tram tracks of this state. This revocation motion should be supported. Thank you, Mr Davis, for bringing it on.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (16:37): This is a discussion that we are having that is central to an issue being experienced not just within Victoria but around Australia. We have a fundamental and chronic shortage of housing to meet the needs and the aspirations of people who are looking to either find and secure a rental property or move into home ownership. We know that in order to address this shortage in housing we need to do a number of things: not only to make a housing market opportunity about an asset in which to live but also to provide more housing within a city that is going to be the size of London by the 2050s.

Any kind of attempt to simply allow development carte blanche across the city without careful consideration for impact, for the importance of amenity and for opportunity leads to the sorts of outcomes that really embody intergenerational disadvantage or otherwise confer significantly different outcomes on people to further antagonise or aggravate socio-economic difference. This is where the hard work really needs to occur at that interface between supply and demand, growth and affordability. When we released the housing statement it was geared very squarely toward addressing this shortfall. This is occurring in a range of different ways: through planning reform, through the work to make sure we can make better use of vacant government land and through making sure that we can attract the development and the delivery of a variety of different housing configurations, from apartments to townhouses and units. We heard a lot about that today. We heard a lot about it last year when we announced the stamp duty concession, which the Treasurer, the Premier and the Minister for Planning have just announced will continue as an off-the-plan concession for another 12 months from October this year, saving people around \$25,000 when getting into the market. But also we need to make sure that we can make better use of household land. Where you have got a building site or a home block of at least 300 square metres you can have a small second dwelling of up to 60 square metres on that block without needing to secure planning approval, and having a planning permit will no longer be a requirement. This is one example of what we are doing to increase the availability of supply.

When we also couple that with rental reforms, with the sorts of opportunities for planning scheme changes for the broader work around infrastructure – and I will get to the Suburban Rail Loop in a moment – we know that what we are doing is addressing that shortfall and addressing that disadvantage. We are taking the steps of early intervention and prevention to make for better outcomes for millennials who want to get into their own home, who deserve to have the opportunity to be able to live closer to where they grew up, because as we expand in number to a city the size of London by the 2050s, if we do not do something about making better use of our land, then we are going to have these vast tracts of disadvantage, not for want of aspiration but for lack of opportunity.

When we do this work it is through a process of consultation. Consultation is not, however, something which can continue ad infinitum until such time as everybody is happy. This is hard work. It is work that involves and requires and invites compromise, and that is indeed what is happening here. Victoria has the highest share of first home buyers in Australia. Victoria has the best affordability for renters in Australia. The PropTrack and the CommSec reports bear this out. As I said, this is work which requires an ongoing conversation with communities, and that is exactly what has been happening. This is about making sure that we continue a process of review, engagement and consideration, and where changes can be made, they will be.

This is also about standards. It is about moving away from the sorts of apartments that we saw being built under the former coalition government – these awful dogboxes that did not have space for a double bed, that had no natural light, that had insufficient noise barriers and that had the worst of all

possible outcomes but were counted as stock nonetheless. Giving these things a tick of approval is not delivering more housing; it is consigning people to the very disadvantage that we are looking to address.

This is about homes. It is about opportunities and their careful development through planning decisions of amenity, neighbourhoods and character. It is about making sure that we maintain the sorts of standards that have applied – and properly applied – since we developed and delivered the housing statement. Is this straightforward work? No. Is this easy work? Definitely not. Is this work that needs to continue? Absolutely.

And so we will do that and we will work alongside communities, but we also need to face the reality that without moving to deliver significantly more housing – housing which indeed members on the opposite benches have called for time and time again in their inaugural speeches and in their times prior to Parliament and indeed when and as it might have suited them for convenient and perhaps unrelated purposes – talk from those opposite does nothing but block the sorts of outcomes that people need and deserve in a roof over their heads. We have a lot of work to do, and we can and we should be doing that work together. This is where, again, government is continuing to work hard, work in good faith, work carefully and work iteratively with communities. That is exactly what we will continue to deliver. We need change. Anybody who is looking for a home in Melbourne, anybody who is saving for a deposit in Melbourne, knows this only too well.

There are new standards; the Minister for Planning has been very clear about that. We will continue to work towards making sure that they are delivered in a way that is accountable and that is transparent, and we will work to make sure that as we deliver more housing we are changing the planning rules to ensure that we are delivering more housing and more opportunities in the right places. This will not be about standing on the back of a ute, as a former Leader of the Opposition did in Bills Street in Hawthorn, saying that social housing could not go there because it was not connected to amenity and to services. This will not be about what the opposition has done in blocking housing in Markham estate. This will not be about saying in fact that there should be more housing, just not here. This needs to be about a collective effort to understand where and how we can deliver housing to the right standards, in the right ways, at the right times – not just for us but for our kids and for our grandkids and not just for how we live now but for how we want to live as we downsize. This is about planning and planning well, and it is about having a city that grows and grows in a way that is equitable and that provides good opportunities for people who deserve them – as I said, hard work, ongoing work, necessary work and work that should be occurring with the support of people who are otherwise inclined, as they show only too well from the coalition benches, to block rather than build.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:46): In the very short time I have, I will say up-front that the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this revocation motion. As was outlined by Dr Mansfield, this is a very blunt instrument that we are talking about here. As I speculated in the last week of Parliament, I said that this entire inquiry was just so that the opposition could come forward with a motion exactly like what is happening today, and that is exactly what they are doing. I will say this: anyone that wants to stand in the way of building new housing in Victoria is showing a lack of moral leadership. It is absolutely imperative that we build more housing in Victoria, and what is happening is we have a generation of young people that are white hot with rage at what is happening, and it is driving political extremism on both sides of the spectrum. At the last federal election we had a Senate candidate from the socialists who built his reputation on occupying houses. They want inheritance taxes and they want to take property away from people, and you will end up with extremism on this side of the spectrum. On the other side you have white supremacists who want to blame everything on immigrants, right? We need to move forward with building more housing. I do not think that what Labor is doing is the best solution, but it is going to provide some more streamlining and will lower some of the holding costs, because things will not be held up at VCAT for years, which will lower costs, and therefore we need to go ahead with it. (*Time expired*)

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I move, by leave:

That the member be able to consider and conclude his contribution with additional time.

**Leave refused.**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:48): We had a tight timeline on this, a 90-minute slot, and people had understood that we would stick to that timeline, and that is what we are doing. So let us be clear here: we are dealing with a revocation motion for two of the three planning amendments that were subject to the inquiry. The inquiry was undertaken very specifically to dig in and get what evidence we could in the short time period before a revocation had to be chosen or not chosen, and the evidence that was heard at that inquiry was very clear: the government did not consult properly. The fact is that the solution the government has provided is not the right solution. Mr Limbrick says it might provide something. Well, actually the evidence is it will not provide the solution; in fact it will provide a worse outcome in many respects. It will be a situation where terrible damage is done to many of the important features of our city – the tree canopy, which is so important for our city, for the ambience of our city, for the state of our city as it gets hotter; but equally the heritage requirements to actually make sure that our city is protected and key pieces of heritage are protected. But they will not be under these proposals and under these rules that the government has put in place. The evidence was quite clear that that heritage will be lost. This will be an act of vandalism in the city. We will see the destruction of huge swathes of our city, and it will not be to build homes for young people, it will be to build expensive homes in the \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million to \$2.2 million to \$2.5 million type zone. And that is what is being proposed here: bulldoze areas of the city, knock over the trees, knock over the heritage buildings and the heritage streetscapes and build expensive townhouses that will be hot and relatively unpleasant.

We also heard evidence of the government's authoritarian and arrogant approach to rolling over councils and communities. It should have listened, and I have to say the minister's contribution just now showed that she had simply not read the report and simply did not understand what had occurred at the hearings.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I take offence to the remark and the assertion that Mr Davis has made on the basis that it is unparliamentary, and I would seek that he withdraw.

**David DAVIS:** I will not. It is a matter of debate.

**Harriet Shing:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, I just want to confirm that, having read the report, I am happy to table what I read – Mr Davis, if you would like to see that that happens, on the basis that I did go through it before I got to my feet.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Thank you, Minister Shing. I think we have had enough of this point of order. I rule in favour of Mr Davis. Can we just move on, please.

**David DAVIS:** This is a dystopian outcome that is being proposed for our city. There will be that loss of heritage, there will be an enormous loss of vegetation and we will see terrible dogboxes built across the city. The VC267 amendment actually licenses buildings without proper controls by councils, without proper input from local communities and without the democratic vent of ability to appeal. That is an amendment that I think many people understand is going to cause tremendous damage.

There is ample opportunity for the state government to bring on additional housing. We did in government actually do that, and we would in government again provide additional housing. There are massive tracts of land that are available.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** We have quoted three in the report just as examples, and there are dozens and dozens of examples of where land can be brought on.

What is also clear is that the taxation of this government is actually pricing young people out of the market. It is because more than 40 per cent of the cost of a property, a new dwelling, is state taxation, and that is the state government doing that. That is Ms Shing, that is Ms Kilkenny and that is those ministers and the state government after 11 years in power, let us never forget. Suddenly there is urgency now because they have woken up to their botched planning policy over the last 11 years. They have had 11 years in power, and they have botched planning in this state. They have caused damage, and now they want to go the whole hog. They really want to go for the dystopian future. They want to bulldoze vast tracts of our state, and they want to do that in an arrogant way. They want to roll over councils and communities that love their neighbourhoods.

I say people want to see their neighbourhoods protected. I say we need more housing, but I say it has got to be done in a democratic way.

**Council divided on motion:**

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

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

**Motion negatived.**

*Business of the house*

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

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:00): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills*

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

*Council's amendments*

**The PRESIDENT** (17:00): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Electricity Safety Act 1998**, the **Gas Safety Act 1997**, the **Pipelines Act 2005**, the **Energy Safe Victoria Act 2005**, the **Land Act 1958** and the **Electricity Industry Act 2000** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

**David Limbrick:** On a point of order, President, on statements and reports, my understanding of the sessional orders is that they need to either start at 5:15 pm or after 300 minutes of general business has elapsed, and it is my understanding that neither of those things has happened.

**The PRESIDENT:** We have just adjourned off the rest of the general business. We just adjourned it off then, through a motion from Mr Davis.

**David Limbrick:** But 300 minutes has not elapsed.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, but you can adjourn anything off, no matter what the time prescribes, with a motion, which we just did.



*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Department of the Legislative Council***Report 2023–24*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:02): I rise to speak on the annual report of the Department of the Legislative Council, which amongst many things covers the various activities that we as parliamentarians take part in, such as parliamentary friendship groups. One such group that I am very proud to be a part of is the Parliamentary Friends of Ukraine. Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to visit Ukraine to see firsthand the impacts of Russia's illegal war and to convey my support and that of our Premier. One of the first things that I saw in the city of Kyiv was a visit to an apartment block just a few minutes out from the city centre in an ordinary suburban neighbourhood. Four days beforehand this apartment block had been hit with a drone. Thirteen people were killed and 90 were injured. This was an ordinary apartment block in an ordinary suburb, with peak hour traffic going nearby and a Macca's serving drive-through coffee around the corner. To see the impact of this destruction was simply harrowing – on ordinary people just trying to live their lives.

I had the opportunity to visit many zones which were occupied temporarily by the Russians at the outbreak of the full-scale invasion, including Irpin, Bucha, Hostomel and Borodyanka, where civilians were tortured, raped and killed, often killed for sport. I got to visit the Romaniv bridge in Irpin, where I met with the mayor. This is the bridge that was blown up by Ukraine and played a major role in stopping the Russian advance. The citizens of this city have rightly been dubbed citizens of the city of heroes.

It was remarkable to see that the reconstruction efforts are not some theoretical, future thing, they are well advanced. In some cities where 70 per cent of buildings had been significantly damaged or destroyed, driving through some streets you would not know it, which is a testament to the resilience of the Ukrainian people.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet with many MPs, ministers and other officials, including with the minister responsible for de-mining the vast swathes of the country that have been illegally landmined by Russia. I will take this opportunity to note the very sad loss of an Australian who put himself in harm's way and was killed for it just a few days ago. I had the opportunity to meet with people who were tortured as prisoners of war, including a remarkable woman, Yuliia Paievska, better known as Taira, who was responsible for getting the last footage out of Mariupol through her body cam. She was working there as a medic treating Ukrainians and Russians. After she got the footage out she was captured and tortured for three months. She required spinal surgery to recover. I got to meet with non-profits and organisations working to bring the tens of thousands of children home who have been illegally abducted and fostered out to Russia. On one night I had to shelter in an air raid shelter – a very, very small sacrifice compared to the days, months and years of sheltering that Ukrainians have had to do.

Russia is waging a campaign of terror on the Ukrainian people in the cruellest way possible. They have abducted children, sent air strikes into cities while people sleep and tortured prisoners of war in open defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not just a land grab, it is an attempt to systematically destroy the Ukrainian people and their culture. It is pure multifaceted evil, but they will fail. It is more important than ever that we are all aware of the situation in Ukraine and doing what we can to support it and to partner with it. I would like to thank the many people who generously gave their time to meet with me. I would also like to thank ambassador Vasyl Myroshnychenko; the parliamentary friendship group, including Lee Tarlamis; Eugene Hawryszko and Ashley Awramenko from the Association of Ukrainians in Victoria; Teresa Lachowicz from the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations; the Dobosh family in Lviv; Kosta Yaramenko; Vika Stegnii; and most especially Chrestyna Kmetj and Julian Knysh. The situation in Ukraine is rapidly evolving and remains uncertain. I dearly wish for a resolution to this war that delivers peace and that delivers justice to all of Ukraine. Slava Ukraini.

**Legal and Social Issues Committee***Inquiry into Food Security in Victoria*

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:07): I rise to speak about the Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee's food security in Victoria inquiry of 2024. This report came out before I was on the actual committee, but given my expertise in education, I think it is important to bring this matter to the house. Given the importance of food education in fostering healthy eating habits and addressing food security issues within the school curriculum, I am responding to this report and calling on the government to commit to funding recommendation 1 of the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into food security in Victoria November 2024, which states:

That the Victorian Government provide support to schools who wish to expand their food education programs, including encouraging them to take a place-based approach by working collaboratively with local communities to meet the specific needs and challenges of each region.

The place-based approach means involving potentially local farmers, chefs and food-related businesses who collaborate with schools to provide hands-on learning experiences. I commend the work of the committee, which has as its terms of reference:

- (1) the impact of food insecurity in Victoria, on –
  - (a) physical and mental health;
  - (b) poverty and hardship; and
- (2) options available to lower the cost of food and improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

These experiences could be something like farm visits, cooking classes or gardening projects, helping students to develop practical skills like growing, cooking and preparing nutritious meals. The goal of this approach is to connect students with their local food systems, fostering both a sense of community and a deeper understanding of sustainable healthy eating practices.

The report outlines that one of the worst impacts of our recent cost of living crisis is food insecurity, and we have seen in Victoria that there has been a huge increase in both the number of people needing to access food relief services and the amount of food that has been distributed across the community. There are many reasons why people are in this position – obviously the government has to take responsibility for this – with the obvious one being the rising price of food connected with the dire circumstances that families are now finding themselves in financially.

Food security has a dramatic impact on individuals and families. The committee heard how physical and mental health suffers when people do not have access to adequate nutritious and culturally appropriate food. What happens to our most vulnerable children – our children – when they do not have enough food? This, according to the inquiry, has been a recurring theme that has been raised through the inquiry: the importance of integrating food education more thoroughly into curriculums and community programs. I do know that teachers are overwhelmed with the clutter in our curriculum, but the Victorian government have acknowledged in their submission to the inquiry that one of the key challenges faced by young people is limited nutrition literacy, as well as insufficient opportunity to source and cook nutritious food.

I had the great privilege of doing a school visit to Oatlands Primary School last year. In inquiring about a particular mural that they had designed I was taken internally into the school to discover that they actually have a food tech room for primary school students. Outside that food tech room they have a beautiful vegetable and herb garden, and the children were actually growing vegetables and herbs and then having lessons on how to use those vegetables and herbs in their own cooking, which was being facilitated in this gorgeous primary school food tech room. I personally think that that is a great facility. It really distresses me that Oatlands Primary School has been chopped to pieces by this government and been forced to reduce its staff by half. I think they were forced to reduce its staff by 40 last year,

when they had a thriving school, were doing an incredible program and were actually meeting some of the needs that were reported about in this particular report.

There are other schools doing other things. Some schools have embedded food literacy as a mandatory component of the curriculum, and others are doing it on an elective basis. Submissions made to the inquiry highlighted the benefit of school programs providing practical skills around food preparation, cooking and nutrition, which will help young people build confidence and knowledge in healthy eating practices. These are all from submission 78, page 7; 35; and 7 to 38. These findings show that teaching these life skills early in childhood education is seen to empower young people to make healthy food choices throughout their lives. I do want to commend this. There are a number of great programs suggested here, but one in four children are living in poverty just in the Greater Dandenong area alone, so this does need to be addressed. There are a number of things in the inquiry worth looking at.

### **Northern Health**

#### *Report 2023–24*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:12): I rise to speak on the Northern Health annual report 2023–24. When we speak of annual reports in this place I think sometimes what is easy to lose focus on is that while annual reports for health services talk about numbers, how many patients were seen and how many services were delivered, behind those numbers the meaning is that people are connected to those numbers and every figure is a person and a member of a family or a community. The kind of health system we are building under the Allan Labor government is reflected in these reports.

Recently I had the privilege of visiting the Northern Hospital, which is one of the busiest hospitals in Victoria. It lies just outside the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region but services communities across the western parts of my region. Northern Health serves one of the most diverse and rapidly growing populations in Victoria. The Northern Health annual report demonstrates something all of us in this place should be proud of, which is a health service evolving with its community, putting equity, inclusion and dignity at the centre of care. I know the staff are very proud of those issues. They place them at the forefront of the way and the model in which they deliver care.

Women make up just over half the population – that should come as no surprise to anyone in this place – but for too long their health needs were treated as niche or secondary, and the Allan Labor government knows that it is not good enough for that to occur. Consequently, the Northern Hospital is showing what it means in terms of what meaningful change can look like. During the period of the report that I am speaking about now Northern Health oversaw the establishment of a dedicated women's health hub, an innovative integrated model of care which deals with diverse and broad-ranging issues from contraception to menopause, from prolapse to pelvic pain. The hub recognises that women's health is complex and interconnected, and it prioritises access, respect and outcomes. Therefore no woman, at whatever stage of life, should fall through any cracks of any system. Importantly, what the report also highlights is the expansion of abortion services, because access to reproductive health is not a luxury, it is a right. Through community-based hubs and hospital-based clinics, Northern Health is making sure that reproductive care is local, timely and compassionate, and this is what health equity looks like in action.

Over the past 6½ years I have been an ongoing advocate for an improvement to abortion access. In an ideal world medical and surgical abortions would not be needed and people could enjoy safe sex, not be sexually assaulted or have medical complications or conditions that make it unsafe to have a child and of course be able to have children if they want to have them when they are ready. However, we all know that this is not always the case, and therefore access to easily accessible, safe and timely abortions is a right that any person with female reproductive organs should have.

An example of this concern in terms of equity of access was recently highlighted when I was looking into the rates of child and teen pregnancy across Victoria. What we see is that births per thousand

across the 13- to 18-year-old cohort rests at about 4.2 live births per thousand, but in some of the western parts of our state it is as high as 29 live births per 1000. What this demonstrates is there is an inequity of access across parts of Victoria and especially in the north-west of Victoria.

If an individual wants to give birth to a child, they should be supported in that decision, whether that is supporting them to complete their schooling and become a parent or further down the track when they are ready to enrol their child in kindergarten services. However, if they do or are not ready to have a child for whatever reason, they should be able to access appropriate abortion care locally in their communities when they need it. This is something that the Allan Labor government is aware of and continues to work on. On the flip side of this argument, it is also about recognising that people who might struggle to have children should be supported, and that highlights the full implementation of Northern Health's fertility services. That means women in the north will now have access to specialist consultations, ultrasounds, medication and cycle management – again, closer to home and grounded in best practice.

I also want to acknowledge the work of the Narrun Wilip-giin Aboriginal support unit. Their work in promoting cultural safety, reconciliation and self-determination remains central to Northern Health's mission and the Allan Labor government's commitment to First Nations health equity.

In conclusion, the report is not just about services delivered but about the values and the lives of the people who live behind them, when care is not just provided but provided with dignity and when access is not just promised but delivered. I want to thank Northern Health for all the work that they do, and I commend this report to the Council.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Budget papers 2024–25*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:17): I rise to speak on the state budget of 2024–25. The budget raises the funding to fund a whole lot of projects, but what I want to speak about are some of the projects that were missing from last year's budget that the government has the opportunity to correct when it delivers its budget next week.

I am going to start with roads, and the first thing we need in northern Victoria is three big bypasses. The Shepparton bypass is a project that has been worked on for three decades. I was on a committee working on the Shepparton bypass before I was even elected to this place. The former Morrison Liberal government put aside \$208 million in funding to build stage 1 of the bypass. It needed the state to match that with their 20 per cent of the funding and also a commitment to building it. The state did not do that, so what did the Albanese Labor government do? They took that funding away when they did their infrastructure review.

The same thing happened in Rutherglen. Rutherglen has also been crying out for a bypass of their town, and some money was committed towards it by the former federal Liberal government, but what happened when the infrastructure review was done? That money disappeared as well.

The Kilmore bypass is another project – the member for Euroa was here, but she has gone now – that the community has been crying out for for many years. The former member for Seymour Cindy McLeish actually did get a commitment for the construction of the Kilmore bypass out of the Baillieu and Napthine Liberal governments, but what did the Andrews Labor government do? They took that off the agenda and they spent that money elsewhere; they took that money away as well.

We also need to see investment in the duplication of Donnybrook Road. Mr Mulholland and I have gone on ad nauseam about the duplication of Donnybrook Road and the duplication of the flyover over the Hume Freeway. But if you were out there now, if you were trying to get off the Hume Freeway onto Donnybrook Road coming from Melbourne, you would be queued up back to Craigieburn. It is disgraceful to see what is going on in that community and the traffic congestion that is created because of that road, which is a country lane, not a road.

Howard Street and the Midland Highway intersection in Bendigo has been deemed the worst intersection in the state. It is in the Premier's own electorate, and yet it has not been funded for an upgrade. The Premier must ensure that the Treasurer puts funding for that in the budget next week. The Calder Highway and Maiden Gully Road intersection, again, needs an upgrade. And we need rail. We need an extension of the Upfield line to Wallan, and electrification. They need to add a train station at Beveridge, and the Wollert rail extension also needs to be funded.

With health projects, Goulburn Valley Health needs to be completed. Stage 1 was completed but not stage 2. This government has taken stage 2 off the agenda, and it needs to be put back on the agenda so that we have the health service that the people of Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley deserve. Wodonga needs further funding to allow its hospital to be built on a greenfield site. It is a joke what this government is doing in Wodonga, building a hospital in New South Wales that is not even going to increase the bed numbers or service that community into the future. The Daylesford hospital is a disgrace. I was there recently, and it desperately needs upgrading. This is in the Minister for Health's own electorate. The Liberal Party committed \$75 million for that project at the last election. Labor did not commit anything, and unfortunately the people of Daylesford and surrounding areas have been let down because Labor have still not invested in their hospital. That must be done next week.

On education, there is the Wangaratta High School – I see the member for Ovens Valley up here. Labor promised \$11.7 million at the 2022 state election, but we have not seen that money yet, so that needs to be in the budget next week for the Wangaratta High School. The Banmira Specialist School in Shepparton needs to be completed. At the moment it is only half done, and it is a disgrace that it has not been completed. We need to see drop-off and pick-up points at the Epsom Primary School in Bendigo and at the Grahamvale Primary School in Shepparton improved, and the Kialla West Primary School also needs an upgrade to its pedestrian crossing. That needs to be funded in next week's budget.

### **Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo**

#### *Petition*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:23): I would like to speak on a tabled petition, and I would like to thank a constituent of mine, Gaurav Ramchandani, for organising this petition of 685 citizens of Mickleham, Kalkallo and Donnybrook:

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

It wants the Legislative Council to call on the government to meet this demand.

I think it is an important one. It is one that Ms Lovell and I have advocated for over a long period of time with residents, and it is a view advocated by many residents. To draw you back to where we started, in 2022 the government committed \$6 million for a slip lane on the Mitchell Street roundabout on Donnybrook Road, which would ease some traffic congestion on Donnybrook Road. People were waiting over an hour just to get out of their housing estate because their housing estate had one road in and one road out connected to an old farm track which they had not actually duplicated. Residents were pretty sick of this. I only got elected in 2022, but it caused some of the biggest incoming traffic in terms of phone calls and inquiries to my office. So I worked with that community very closely. We managed to make it a statewide issue on the ABC, on *A Current Affair*, on *Sunrise* and in the *Daily Mail* – lots of media – till the government was dragged kicking and screaming to bring forward that commitment for a slip lane, which they had not planned on building until 2026, to September 2023. It is funny, when there is statewide media attention, how quickly they can shuffle things forward in the roads portfolio.

Now the government is refusing to duplicate the bridge over the Hume. They have recently changed the speed limits on the Hume Highway going north. It is no longer 100 kilometres an hour, it is only 80 kilometres an hour, so the traffic on Donnybrook Road is so bad it is slowing the entire state down. And yes, there are queues all the way to Craigieburn. But that seems to be the solution for this government, because they have signed up with, I suspect, a very small amount of money, because the feds are contributing about 90 per cent to the slip lane we just talked about. They have now decided they are going to blow up the roundabout they upgraded thanks to our advocacy and build traffic lights. So a roundabout they have just installed and a slip lane they just installed a couple of years ago – they have now decided they are going to spend millions to blow it up and put in traffic lights rather than tackling the actual issue, which is the bridge over the Hume.

I thank my Liberal colleagues who were in government from 2010 to 2014, because they actually had the foresight – and I want to particularly acknowledge Matthew Guy – when they were building Mickleham to sit the developers down to sign a developer contribution plan, which meant the Mickleham side of Donnybrook Road was completely duplicated before and as people moved in, not decades later.

We have got an old farm track connecting tens of thousands of new homes, which this government obviously do not have the money to duplicate, and instead of duplicating the bridge over the Hume, which everyone wants, they want to duplicate a small bridge over the Merri Creek and blow up a roundabout they only just built and put in traffic lights. Well, the communities of Mickleham and Kalkallo and Donnybrook deserve better than this government with its ad hoc approach to planning and its ad hoc approach to roads.

I have invited the Minister for Roads and Road Safety repeatedly to come to Donnybrook Road with me at peak hour to see for herself what it looks like and what the daily commute is like for these residents. I have been out at Donnybrook Road at 6 in the morning to view the traffic, and it is awful. We have got inadequate bus infrastructure as well, no public transport, and these communities are left to languish because the government cannot manage money. It is communities in Kalkallo, Mickleham and Donnybrook that are paying the price.

### *Petitions*

#### **National parks**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:28): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

This historic petition has garnered 40,208 signatures, and it sends a clear message to the Allan government: Victorians deserve public access to public land. Labor must preserve the status quo, preserve the current land tenure and not create any new national parks. What we want to see, what these 40,000 Victorians want to see, is our cherished national parks and our loved state forests and reserves open for public access.

Responsible for public land management, the Allan government is a poor neighbour, and we know that from our bushfires and an inept public land manager. Visit any of our national parks, visit any of our state forests, and you will see overgrown tracks and you will see decaying infrastructure – if it is still there. A cash-strapped government is cutting frontline boots on the ground and neglecting forests, which leads to poorer environmental outcomes. This is a perverse outcome this government is seeking. There are insufficient field staff, there are insufficient rangers, there is a proliferation of pests and weeds – ask any country person and they will tell you that – and there is an ever increasing threat of out-of-control bushfire.

Coupled with the loss of our experienced timber workers and the bungled and botched transition, our regional communities are more and more at risk. Parks Victoria has had \$95 million gutted from its budget and a halving of its core services. Locking up more of our state forests as national parks serves

no-one, and restricting Victorians from our traditional pursuits, such as free and dispersed camping, dirt and trail bike riding, horseriding, hunting, four-wheel driving, prospecting and fossicking, does not guarantee any better conservation of vulnerable species.

This country, our country, evolved by and through people – First Nations people – managing the land in the landscape. Forests were selectively cool burnt, species were hunted and people lived in and around their environment. Today this government is finding excuses to restrict access. In flawed ideology, Labor has committed to locking up 50,000 hectares in the Pyrenees, Wombat and Lerderderg state forests as national park, and the minister has doubled down on this today. While Labor's Great Outdoors Taskforce has announced it will not be recommending any new national parks, caveats hide the reality. The footprint in the Central Highlands was excluded from this probe. The great forest national park threat is live; 350,000 hectares are under consideration.

The groups that have energised this petition deserve great thanks. The work of the group Victorians Against the Great Forest National Park has been influential in leveraging signatures and raising the issue's profile. The genesis, though, of the movement came decades ago with Bush Users Group United Victoria and the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria, and we thank them for leading the charge. The late, great Rita Bentley, our fierce champion for access to land rights, and the prospectors and miners are remembered today. The Fuel Reduction Saves Lives campaign was a passion of hers, and I reignited that passion with her shortly before her death after the 2020 fires. The Nationals and Liberals have stood, stand by stand, with BUGU – champions like Bill Schulz, thank you very much.

If you want to go and have a look at a shining example of conservation, go and have a look at Heart Morass in my electorate. Field & Game do amazing work for conservation. The stewards of the High Country, the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, keenly recognise how to better manage ecosystems. Sporting Shooters Association Australia and the Australian Deer Association are exemplars too.

Not all Victorians respect, unfortunately, the bush as they should. However, there are a plethora of bush user groups who are instrumental in removing debris. The Erica community is teaching people how to respect free camping sites, and our volunteer groups are increasingly lifting that heavy load of weed eradication and pest eradication because the government has dropped the ball.

People need not be excluded from the bush for conservation to occur. Neglect must be reversed, and public access must be maintained. With the passion that is been kept by this 40,000 people in Victoria, this government must listen, must respect and create no new national parks.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:33): I want to start by acknowledging everyone who has signed this petition, but I also want to note the mistruths of the Liberals and the National Party in the campaign that they have run. There are two separate issues at hand, and the two have been conflated. There is the west of the state and there is Gippsland. The Nationals and the Liberals have run around stoking and whipping up fear, as they always do in this situation. The Nationals know the government has no intention to create national parks in Gippsland, but they have no interest in the truth.

The Great Outdoors Taskforce is talking about how we grow regional Victoria, get better visitor experiences and more tourism and economic activity. In the west, in all three new national parks you will be able to go camping, fishing, hiking, four-wheel driving, trail bike riding and mountain bike riding. In all three national parks you will be able to go horseriding, dog walking and undertake dispersed camping in specific areas outlined by the land manager. And in the new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park you will be able to undertake seasonal deer hunting in the areas that were previously state forest. We have found the right balance here to protect what needs to be protected while keeping the land open and accessible for the activities that Victorians love. It is far from being locked up. That is why the disinformation campaign being waged by the Liberal and National parties is so cheap. The future use of public land should be debated and discussed by the

community, but it should only be done with all the facts at hand. All this information that I am just talking about now can be found and is publicly available.

I personally do not believe in the term ‘wilderness’. I think that we should engage with our natural places. I think people should use them and enjoy them and value them, but we want everyone to do it safely. We want to keep pests and feral animals out of there, so we need to work together to get good environmental and economic outcomes. I am proud to be from a party with four regional Premiers who do the things for regional Victoria that are so, so valuable. While the Nationals and Liberals close schools, we build them and open them. While they close or privatise hospitals or aged care centres, we build them. While you might shut train lines, shut train stations and rip them out, we build them. While you wanted cheaper Metro fares at the last election, we gave regional Victorians capped fares – and by God has it been popular. While you shut TAFEs across regional Victoria, we build them. We train the chippies, the plumbers, the sparkies, the hairdressers and the nurses to work in these local communities. This generation of workers that we train we ensure are well paid, because it is the Nationals and Liberals’ economic policy to drive down the wages and conditions of workers. You know that is the absolute truth.

It is the continual negativity of the Liberals and the Nationals that has seen you cop an absolute bollocking at the federal election. You have copped an absolute hammering with false promises for regional communities like nuclear energy that would not deliver power for 20 years, that would not deliver jobs for decades. You bring no policies and no plans to the Victorian people. And no wonder the National–Liberal coalition is under question by many people around the country, because you are being driven by the by the Queensland Nationals and you are unable to bring policies to this place to debate for Victorians.

I want to acknowledge all those that have signed the petition. I want to acknowledge why you have come to a position of concern and fear, but I ask you to go and look at the publicly available information. I would ask the Liberals and Nationals for once to get on with something positive and bring something that resembles a set of values, some policies and a plan for Victorians to actually look at. Give Victorians something to consider, particularly regional Victorians. Give them something that they can look forward to rather than looking in the rear-view mirror and running the divisive, negative politics that you always do.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:38): I rise to speak on the petition. Victorians love our native forests, and we know people want to get out and enjoy these natural wonders and protect them for future generations to enjoy as well. So it is no surprise that Victorians overwhelmingly want more national parks. Polling by RedBridge last October found a whopping 80 per cent of Victorians want more national parks. That is four in five Victorians who want more of these kinds of protection – an incredible level of popularity. So my question today is: why is Labor dragging its feet on the three new national parks in the central west? Back in 2021 Labor promised national parks in the Wombat and Wellsford forests, Mount Buangor and the Pyrenees. It is now 2025, and we are yet to see a single new park. There is no good reason for this delay. The vast majority of Victorians support the move, as I have said, and Labor would have crossbench support to make them a reality. So think of the legacy that will create.

It is especially infuriating for communities in the central west, who have been campaigning for these protections for decades. These forests are irreplaceable country for First Nations people, home to endangered brush-tailed phascogales, greater gliders, rare plants like the wombat bossiaea and the hundreds of other unique and threatened species that call them home. National parks would guarantee protections for these species for generations to come while ensuring communities today can get out now and enjoy these places with their families. And of course Victoria’s ecosystems are in a state of crisis, and national parks are one of the best, most popular ways to arrest that.

Just this week, in the latest alarming move from the Trump administration, we have seen disturbing moves to gut national parks in the US. Funding to run parks has been cut with expectations that some



parks will have to cut services and the ability to open. There are also reported plans to privatise those glorious national assets, and Americans are rightly appalled at this. There is a proud and historical link between parks in the USA and Australia. Yellowstone, in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, was the world's first national park, established in 1872. But not many Australians would know that in our history the national park in New South Wales was the world's second national park, established in 1879 and renamed Royal National Park only in 1955. Victoria was not far behind, with our first national park being the Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve, where my mum and I actually had a memorable and terrifying encounter with an emu that was a big fan of barbecue sausages, near the Great Ocean Road. It was established in just 1892.

National parks speak to who we are as Australians. National parks protect, restore and rejuvenate, and we need to open up more national parks so Victorians can get out and enjoy these precious areas. That means bushwalking, picnics, photography, camping and more. It is an absolute furphy that anyone is getting locked out of Australia's national parks. Everyone is welcome in a national park. The only things that are locked out are activities that destroy natural wonders for short-term gains: shooting, mining and logging.

Despite the immense popularity of national parks and despite knowing, as Mr McIntosh has just said, that the coalition is just cynically spreading misinformation, Labor under Jacinta Allan seems petrified of acting. Last October the Minister for Environment promised that the bills for the first two parks would come later in 2024. Well, it is now May 2025, and we have not seen a single bill for the creation of these parks come before Parliament. Why is Labor dragging its feet over these three national parks? We are concerned it could be backflipping on another pledge for future generations.

In 2023 the Great Outdoors Taskforce was established to investigate and recommend new areas for national parks, and in particular areas that were part of forests that were saved from logging. A year later the taskforce had that remit revoked. Clearly Labor is in danger of bowing to a scare campaign and refusing to even consider protections we know Victoria will need down the track, like the great forest national park, which would create an amazing new nature experience just an hour north of Melbourne. We have more than 2000 listed threatened species and ecosystems, and all indicators are that this situation is getting worse. That is not good enough for our natural resources and for our communities who want to enjoy and preserve them. Labor, it is time to finally deliver these national parks. We know that future generations will thank you for it.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:42): I rise to join in this debate on this petition that has been signed by 40,208 Victorians protesting against the Allan Labor government's plans to create new national parks in Victoria. But I note that this is not the only petition that has had a lot of signatures in the last six months. You can add to that 40,208 the 13,969 Victorians who signed a petition that was tabled by Wayne Farnham, the member for Narracan, and I have a petition that is still live that has 11,767 signatures on it at the moment. So that is over 66,000 Victorians – 66,044 Victorians – who have signed petitions saying they do not want new national parks in Victoria just in the last six months. I would say to Mr McIntosh that the government should start listening to these Victorians. The government is tone-deaf in this state. The Premier stood up and said the federal election was won because Victorians support the Suburban Rail Loop. You guys live in the land of delusion – you are totally delusional. If you think that the SRL is going to win you an election, you are wrong. And if you think that Victorians want more national parks, you are also wrong.

No-one actually gets any benefit out of a national park. Changing the status to a national park does not actually guarantee it any additional resources. There is no additional money that comes with that for the management of the park, for the protection of the park. And we have seen the government flip-flopping around on national parks. In 2021 they promised three new national parks. We have not seen them – thank goodness we have not seen them. But then in August last year the Premier stood up at the bush summit in Bendigo and lied to the community. She said she will not put a padlock on our state's public forests, yet only a couple of months later, in October, a spokesperson for the government

let the cat out of the bag. In response to questions from the ABC, the Victorian government spokesperson said legislation relating to the two national parks will be introduced next month:

Legislation to create the first two national parks, Wombat–Lerderderg National Park and Mount Buangor National Park, will be introduced to parliament in November ...

But of course that was November last year. Then in December we had another article, in the *Sunday Age* on 8 December, that said the Victorian government has now abandoned its promise to create a new national park in the state's central west by the end of this year. The government do not know what they are doing and they are flip-flopping around, but in the meantime this causes great distress, particularly in regional communities, because we are the people who are impacted by this. This actually restricts tourism in our area. Everyone says, 'We'll create a national park. That creates tourism.' It does not. It kills industries in our area, and it does not create any new tourism. Our national parks are an absolute fallacy.

Today we see another article, in the *Weekly Times*, that says that Lisa Neville's group has recommended no new national parks for Victoria. The only problem is that they were prevented from actually looking at the areas that have been proposed for those other three national parks. But her taskforce looked at whether there needed to be any further national parks in Victoria and said no. The government should listen to Lisa Neville, and they should abandon their plan for these three national parks that they have been proposing.

We know that the people in country Victoria are the people who have looked after these areas of these forests. The only reason we have the parks and natural forests that we have today is because seven or eight generations of Australians have cared for those forests alongside our Indigenous people, who have cared for them for a very long time as well. Particularly in the Barmah, the Indigenous population up there worked hand in hand with the rest of the population to care for the Barmah forest. That was locked up as a national park. It has not improved the park. We have weeds everywhere. The park has fallen into disrepair, and it is a disgrace.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (17:48): I rise to congratulate Ms Bath on this historic petition and Mr Farnham on his petition in the other place. 40,200-odd people is a serious effort – a very serious effort. I know that some of those people responsible for getting those numbers are in the gallery, and I congratulate them. The public response to this clearly indicates how Victorians outside the quinoa curtain feel about public land access.

Victoria is the envy of the nation when it comes to access for hunters. Few places in the world enjoy the access that we do and want to keep. It is important to note that our duck hunters led the way in the 1950s by voluntarily paying a licence fee, using the funds to conserve habitats for all Victorians. That conservation philosophy is still strong today. You only need to have a look at the awesome work that Field & Game have done at Heart Morass and Connewarre for shining examples of this. Hunting contributes \$335 million to the Victorian economy and underpins over 3000 jobs. Victorian deer hunters take an estimated 140,000 deer a year, most of them on public land, and hunters tend to eat what we hunt too – a stark contrast to the millions of dollars that agencies spend shooting deer to waste from helicopters. This protein should be going to feed the hungry, but that is a different story for a different day.

Let us have a look at what this petition is really about. It is about the Greens proposal to lock up the Victorian Central Highlands into a massive new national park. Greens-aligned groups have been pushing for this since before I came into this place 11 years ago. The driving motivation used to be the end of native timber harvesting. I am sad to say they got what they wanted there, and that industry has effectively been killed off. As I warned the government at the time, giving these extremists what they want was never going to appease them; it was only ever going to embolden them.

So having got what they wanted, why are they still trying to lock up this public land? Who are they trying to protect this land from? The only answer I can see is that they are trying to protect it from us,

from people who they do not agree with and who they frankly look down their noses at. They want to lock out people who are sustainably using public land. They want to lock out people with Ford Rangers and flannel shirts, prospectors, dog owners and, God forbid, camo clothing and Remington rifles. They want to lock out people who work real jobs and enjoy their weekends. They want to lock out people who live outside the shield of the quinoa curtain. They will carry on that anyone who opposes their elitist agenda is anti-environment or anti-conservation. This is not about the environment or conservation. This is about the politics of snobbery and division. It is about the cultural elite telling the millions of Victorians living outside the echo chamber what is good for them. It is the same politics that saw the Greens get sent packing in the federal election just a week or so ago in what I hope is the beginning of the end for that political movement.

There are a wide range of bush users, and I acknowledge all of them and the great Victorians advocating for them, many of whom are in the gallery. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party stands steadfast with you – we always have, we always will. In particular I want to acknowledge the shooting and hunting groups that have worked with me and others on this issue over the past decade, notably the Sporting Shooters Association of Victoria, the Victorian Hound Hunters, the Australian Deer Association, Field & Game and the Gippsland Deer Stalkers. The fight, sadly, is not over yet. We will all keep pushing together until this toxic, elitist, anti-user nonsense is killed off for good.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:51): It is an honour to be able to speak on this petition today signed by over 40,000 people, the largest petition we have ever seen in the history of this chamber. I do want to acknowledge Melina Bath for being the sponsor of that petition and also acknowledge every single person who signed it. It has been signed by bush users, it has been signed by small businesses and it has been signed by regional families who are impacted by the decisions made in this place. This is a historic petition, and it does make a very strong statement in response to the Allan Labor government's plans. They have indicated that legislation will be introduced to create three new national parks.

There is a big difference between state forests and national parks. I know; I live in close proximity to both. I know from speaking with a neighbour who loves horseriding that he was horseriding in the national park and was warned that if he was found there riding a horse he would be fined. But thankfully in the state forest near where I live people can ride their horses on a regular basis and enjoy the beautiful, great outdoors. I know that we enjoy being out there and we enjoy walking our dog, which is not something that you can do in many national parks. People love camping – and free camping in many instances, which is so important for families, particularly with the cost of living – four-wheel driving, trail bike riding and hunting. I thank Mr Bourman, who has spoken about that experience and the valued contribution that hunters make to our local regional economies. And prospecting is so important. I have an uncle, Doug Stone, who has written numerous books about gold prospecting and has made maps, and he has taken tours of people. So many small regional towns, particularly in central Victoria, rely on that tourism economy. They depend on the prospectors that are coming to the region.

I am not surprised that many have signed this petition, because they are concerned. We know – and Wendy Lovell spoke to this – about the Premier, who attended the *Herald Sun* bush summit. I was there in Bendigo, and the Premier at that summit talked about not putting a padlock on public forests. Yet a very short time later we saw the impact that this government's decisions had on Mount Arapiles. I have seen correspondence from businesses who have been impacted by that decision. It is world-class climbing site – it attracts tourists from around the world – yet it has been severely limited, and that does impact the local community, the residents there. It is destroying the local community there.

Mr McIntosh gave us plenty of spin, but the action of this government certainly speaks for itself. The Nationals are opposed to new national parks because we believe the government should be focused on taking care of the existing ones. When it comes to state forests, our public land is public land, and it should remain accessible to the public. We know there are proven benefits, mental health benefits, to being able to enjoy our great outdoors. I recall during COVID there were so many cars that were

parked near the state forest and people getting out and enjoying the beautiful environment that we live in in regional areas.

We do support ongoing and active land management of parks, not neglect. Under-resourcing leads to increased bushfire risk and to an increase in feral animals, and we have seen weeds get out of control. Under this government we continue to see city-based decisions being imposed on rural communities and regional communities with little regard for the people that live there. The Nationals will continue to stand up for regional communities, for fairness and for practical, sustainable land management. I do thank Melina Bath for sponsoring this petition and every single person who signed it.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:56): I thank the members in the chamber who are listening to this and also made a contribution. I was interested that Mr McIntosh could only devote 1 minute of his speech to actually talking about national parks and public land, and the rest was a conflated discussion around federal politics. That is a bit of a sad indictment on what we heard.

I note Ms Copsey's contribution, and I appreciate her love of the forests and national parks. What she failed to admit or understand in terms of the Central West investigation is that over 65 per cent of the public submissions to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council were actually opposed to the locking up of those state forests into national parks. What she failed to recognise too is that the government is not correcting its own homework in this instance. It is not correcting its own homework because it has failed to produce the state of the forests report, which actually looks at what it is doing in conservation. There is no report card on this, so the government therefore cannot be failing, but clearly it is. Also, nature-based experiences can occur now in any location, including state forests. So the government is just blindly carrying on.

I acknowledge Ms Lovell's contribution and identify the fact that there were a great number – 29,000 people – of Victorians who also passionately signed the member for Narracan's petition.

Mr Bourman spoke very clearly about hunter conservationists. My goodness, hunter conservationists and harvesting hunters – what wonderful people, what a wonderful traditional pastime. We should still be supporting these people because they do such work in our environment, but they also create vibrancy in our small communities when they bring their people there.

Finally, Mrs Broad, thank you so much. You talked about prospectors. You talked about Mount Arapiles, which has been shut down. There are a whole raft of issues with Parks Victoria – that is another story.

The last thing I would like to say is that if we ask the people who are sitting in that gallery to show us their hands and put their hands out, they would not be soft and mealy; they would have calluses on them. Why? Because they have been working in the bush. They have been doing the conservation work, and I thank them for their work.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (17:58): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Electorate officers enterprise bargaining agreement**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:58): (1614) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Industrial Relations. The action I seek is for the minister to encourage the Department of Parliamentary Services to proactively commence preparations for the renegotiation of the electorate officers single enterprise agreement, which is due to expire on 30 June 2025. The formal renegotiation period was scheduled between 20 and 30 January, and it is my understanding that it has not begun due to inaction by the Department of Parliamentary Services.

Electorate officers are the backbone of our parliamentary and electorate officer operations. Without their dedication and essential work for members, regardless of political party, every member in this place knows we would not be able to effectively perform our duties. I take the opportunity to acknowledge my outstanding team: Lucas, Melisa, Ash and Rahn. Their work ensures that I remain across my electorate and communications budget, that my diary and media commitments are managed effectively, that community engagement is maintained and that the vital services, such as food and pet food banks, that we offer continue to operate. They also respond to hundreds, sometimes thousands, of constituent inquiries each and every year. I understand that many electorate officers across all parties are seeking improved conditions in areas such as remuneration, cost-of-living support, job security, recognition of their work and access to the tools and equipment needed to perform their roles effectively.

The Community and Public Sector Union, through its State Public Services Federation Victoria branch, will lead negotiations on behalf of electorate officers. I encourage all electorate officers to consider joining and actively participating in their union to ensure a strong collective voice. Dialogue and goodwill in these negotiations will benefit all members and staff of this Parliament.

### **Victorian Fisheries Authority**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (18:00): (1615) Reflecting the theme of parks and outdoor recreation, my adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and it is concerning the proposed cuts to the Victorian Fisheries Authority's fisheries officers. The action I seek is for the minister to review those proposed cuts to the fisheries officer positions and to reinstate the funding necessary for the robust regulation of the fisheries industry.

I have received correspondence from a concerned constituent regarding these cuts. The result of these cuts would be a reduction in the number of fisheries officers from 27 to just nine across Port Phillip Bay and Western Port. Additionally, four bayside stations would be closed, including one in my electorate, in Altona North. Just imagine nine officers covering Port Phillip Bay and Western Port, with extended shifts and having to work one up. Currently fisheries officers are already facing a vacancy rate near 30 per cent, but with this proposed cut many of these vacancies will remain unfilled.

Relying on citizens to report fisheries infringements to an already understaffed police force is simply an unsustainable solution and not feasible. These cuts come at a time when illegal fishing activity is on the rise. In recent months the Victorian Fisheries Authority has reported the apprehension of a crew of four men involved in an illegal fishing haul to the value of \$17,000 on the black market. With illegal fishing increasing, we need more fisheries officers and stronger regulation to effectively combat these issues. Instead the Allan Labor government are cutting these essential services to cover their mismanagement of the state's debts.

You cannot enforce regulation and ensure that compliance is met if you do not have people such as fisheries officers on the ground. Police resources are already on the blink. Victoria is in the middle of a crime crisis, with increasing crime and youth offenders capturing every nightly news report. Police do not have the resources to take over fisheries jobs with additional surveillance, shoreline patrol and enforcing regulations on illegal fishing activities. Victorians want to enjoy recreational fishing, and these cuts do not support the fisheries industry or our outdoor recreation. Therefore I urge the minister to commit to reversing these proposed cuts to fisheries officer positions and allocate funding to ensure strong regulation of the fisheries industry. This is essential not only to preserve our natural environment but also to maintain Australia's status as a leader in the fisheries industry.

### **Pill testing**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:03): (1616) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health. During the debate on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024 I had only one question in the committee stage of debate, and that was to confirm that the legislation allowed for the flexibility of

additional services to receive licences, whether or not they were government funded. My support for the bill was contingent on this. The debate over this issue dragged out for many years, and it was always my view that the service should be permitted but taxpayers should not be funding it, especially when they are experiencing such significant cost-of-living pressure. In response to my question on this the minister gave the reassurance that the legislation allowed for additional licences and that she did not see any reason why this would not be authorised as long as the technical and other requirements were met.

The first summer of service delivery has now concluded, and planning will be starting for next summer. It is my understanding that there is another service that is interested in applying for a licence for next year. Best of all, they are offering to do this at no cost to the taxpayer. This seems like a perfect outcome. The government would have two separate services that they could access to better understand how well they operated, and they would get the second one for free. My request to the minister is to reaffirm her commitment that applications that meet the technical and other requirements will be granted a licence to operate.

### **Tiny Towns Fund**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:05): (1617) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development. The \$20 million Tiny Towns Fund celebrates the pride of place and identity that makes small communities a unique and essential part of Victoria. The awards can bring to life new projects in community infrastructure improvements to facilities and capacity-building projects. I particularly appreciate the way these awards focus and provide for small but often very significant community investments. Last week the grants from \$5000 to \$50,000 were announced across regional Victoria. Can the minister, Jaclyn Symes, indicate how many towns have received funding through the two rounds of the Tiny Towns awards and if there are noticeable themes of where funding is being channelled across the state?

### **Skin cancer**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:06): (1618) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. I am alarmed to see that there has not been any funding for some preventative health measures, and really the Allan Labor government has been missing in action when it comes to preventative health. It is a very important part of our health system, keeping Victorians out of the hospital and also taking the burden off the health system. What I am really concerned about is the lack of support for paid public education to remind Victorians about SunSmart initiatives.

As we know, skin cancer, especially in Australia, has a very high prevalence, affecting a huge amount of not only Victorians but Australians. It remains a significant burden on our health system. Initial analysis from the Economics of Cancer Collaboration revealed that in 2021–22 skin cancer accounted for 51,171 hospital bed days and 19,532 hospitalisations. In regional Victoria there is a significant issue: regional Victorians are around 54 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma than those living in metropolitan areas. In 2023 alone there were more than 164,000 treatments for non-melanoma skin cancers and approximately 3000 newly diagnosed melanomas. SunSmart programs are incredibly important, and public education campaigns have in the past proven to be extremely effective in educating Victorians about the need to be sun smart. But under the Allan Labor government, because of the economic situation and the dire situation of our budget, there has been no funding; it has ceased. There was nothing that occurred in the summer that has just gone by. There is no capacity for that education to go out to remind Victorians of the importance of sun protection. The last time there was a campaign was in 2022–23, which was the Don't Let Cancer In campaign, which focused on Victorian adults aged 30 to 49, including some of those high-risk populations.

The action I am asking is for the minister to ensure that funding is restored to this very important campaign around sun protection and the prevention of cancer, and I am looking forward to seeing that in the upcoming budget.

**Shepparton rail line**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:08): (1619) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the completion of the upgrades to the Shepparton rail line. In 2017 the then Andrews Labor government announced a plan to upgrade the Shepparton rail line. This upgrade included more train services, faster VLocity trains, upgrades to station platforms at Mooroopna, Murchison East and Nagambie, stabling yards in Shepparton and 59 crossing upgrades in the first two stages. These two stages of upgrades were completed in 2022. Three years on, travellers on the Shepparton line are still waiting for the final stage 3 upgrades to be completed. Traffic lights on Wyndham Street, Shepparton, were installed in 2020 in preparation for these upgrades and have yet to be switched on. Victoria's Big Build website lists all but one of the stage 3 upgrades as completed. My constituents are now asking how much longer they will have to wait to see these works completed and the much-needed traffic lights on Wyndham Street switched on. So the action I seek from the Minister for Public and Active transport is for the long-awaited stage 3 upgrades to the Shepparton rail line to be completed.

**First Nations communities**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:10): (1620) My adjournment matter is for the Premier. I rise tonight as a proud Yorta Yorta woman and representative of Melbourne's north deeply disappointed by the recent neo-Nazi behaviour at the Shrine of Remembrance. These acts of hate, performed beneath a monument built to honour those who fought fascism, were a disgraceful betrayal of our values as a society. They attacked the very idea of inclusion and respect, and make no mistake, they were an attack on the ongoing presence, strength and dignity of First Nations people in this country. Their division is not welcome here. The people of Victoria and the people of Australia rejected this division and hate at the ballot box. They voted for unity, for recognition and for truth-telling. Those who try to inflame division are on the fringe, and they do not speak for us. In the face of it, these welcome to country ceremonies have never been more important. These protocols are acts of respect, of grounding and of acknowledgement, not only of place but of history and survival.

Yet I have heard some say that they should not be welcomed to their own country. To those people I say this: you fundamentally misunderstand the meaning of 'country'. For First Nations people country is not just about land; it is lore, it is story, it is kinship and it is language. It is spiritual, living and sovereign. Country is not something that can be owned, claimed or conquered, it is something you belong to and something that must be cared for. Being welcomed to country is not about exclusion, it is about offering respect for tens of thousands of years of continuous culture and being invited to walk together in the spirit of our shared future. The real irony is that, over two centuries, First Peoples have not been welcomed here on our own lands. We were removed from country; our languages were suppressed, our children taken.

The action I seek is for the Premier to work with traditional owners, multicultural communities, civil society and others to ensure that welcomes to country remain visible, supported and protected, not just as a cultural formality but as a vital part of our civic make-up. Now is the time to stand with First Nations people. Now is the time to walk with communities in unity, not give ground to those who peddle hate and division.

**Shepparton sports and events centre**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:12): (1621) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is that the Treasurer commit a minimum of \$8 million in funding towards a new Shepparton sports and events centre in the 2025–26 state budget. A new sports and events centre for Shepparton is long overdue. Greater Shepparton's sports stadium is the home of more than 150 local sporting clubs, with an estimated 15,000 members, and every night of the week it is packed with kids and adults having fun and staying fit, playing a wide variety of sports. But the stadium, which was built in the 1970s, is simply no longer fit for purpose, and it is not compliant with disability access standards. The ageing facility is also falling behind community expectations and desperately needs to

be replaced. First, it is not large enough to cater for existing local demand, and many people who would like to practise and play at the stadium are turned away because there is not enough room. Second, it is not compliant with the standards set for several major sporting codes, like basketball, badminton and netball, which prevents it from hosting national and international tournaments that would bring visitors to Shepparton.

The Shepparton Sports City precinct is home to world-class facilities for a range of sports, and Shepparton regularly hosts major sporting events, like the BMX racing world championships. But when it comes to basketball and other indoor sports, the condition of the stadium means Shepparton is often overlooked as a venue. Our young people deserve a bigger and better facility, but the region also needs a stadium that can attract major events and exhibition games with top athletes to our city.

Greater Shepparton City Council have recognised that the previous design was too costly to win government funding in the present economic environment and have made the wise decision to redesign the sports and events centre. After extensive community consultation council arrived at a new design for a staged redevelopment of the stadium, which includes construction of four basketball and netball courts that will be compliant with national standards; a show court with seating for up to 3000 people; new change rooms for players and officials that will meet standards for elite competitions; administration and function rooms to encourage multipurpose use by a range of users; a new entry lobby, reception area and cafe; extra car parking; paths for cyclists and pedestrians; and a bus stop drop-off to increase access. It will also include a roof that does not leak.

This project is a top priority for the Shepparton city council, as it would cater to the ever-increasing demand for sports facilities for local residents and enable the city to host major events and tournaments that bring visitors to the city and boost the local economy. It has been identified as Basketball Victoria's number one priority for infrastructure investment in regional Victoria, and the government must now step up and fund the stadium.

#### **Bail laws**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:15): (1622) My adjournment is to the Premier, and the action I seek is that she hears the calls from First Nations organisations and stakeholders and meaningfully, respectfully, re-engages with them on bail reform. Yesterday we saw the chair of the Yoorrook commission address the press club with very direct questions over the usefulness of apologies to First Nations people. Apologies are important but cannot be made without meaningful action. She also referenced that there is a long and sad history of governments reneging on their promises when it comes to implementing enduring changes to improve First Peoples' lives. Last year Labor already, disappointedly, rejected Yoorrook's recommendation to create a presumption in favour of bail for all offences, except for murder, terrorism and similarly extreme offences. In March the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, alongside 92 representatives of Aboriginal community controlled organisations, community services and family violence and legal sector organisations, condemned the Premier's suite of kneejerk bail law changes that were rushed through Parliament, and they renewed their call to the Premier to implement Poccum's law. We know that those rushed bail changes and the ones scheduled to come soon will lead to greater criminalisation of Aboriginal communities and other marginalised communities. Granting bail saves lives. Any bail reform must align with and not detract from Poccum's law.

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:17): (1623) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Recently Bayside council bravely passed a resolution calling on the Premier to immediately stop the Suburban Rail Loop due to the government's lack of transparency and the absence of financial and planning justification. Cr Leigh likened the actions of the Premier to that of a dictator, stating:

We have no say in it, they have taken control of everything and it's an order by decree.



The precinct structure plan forecasts an increase of 11,400 residents in Cheltenham by 2041 because of the densification that will occur around the planned new station if the Suburban Rail Loop Authority has its way. The proposed 18-storey high-rises are simply not in keeping with the community's character, and council simply does not have the capacity to cater for such an influx of people, as it would place a major burden on other existing infrastructure. Ratepayers also cannot be expected to pick up the bill for the government's extra required infrastructure around these precincts.

Further, it is still unclear how this government will fund the project. In late March this year Infrastructure Australia released a report, noting that:

Based on the information provided, we have low confidence in the cost estimate for SRL East, presenting a major risk to the SRL East project, and the SRL Program as a whole.

The Suburban Rail Loop will run up our debt even further, incurring larger interest payments that will be paid for by hardworking Victorians. Out-of-control government expenditure also exacerbates inflation issues. The Suburban Rail Loop will be the choice between higher and larger taxes, or the diversion of our scarce taxpayer resources away from local road and rail upgrades and other vital health and safety needs, in favour of this Premier's vanity project. So the action I seek is that the minister join me in meeting with Bayside council to hear their objections and heed the opposition's call to immediately suspend work on this project.

#### **Assisted reproductive treatment services**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:20): (1624) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for their advocacy to ensure that the regulation of IVF is on the national agenda. Many of us were deeply disturbed by the recent news of an embryo mix-up at Monash's IVF clinic in Brisbane that led to a woman giving birth to a stranger's child.

The licensing body for these clinics is the Reproductive Technology Accreditation Committee. Their latest report showed a troubling trend: the number of identification and traceability breaches more than doubled in Australia and in New Zealand in the last financial year. Equally troubling was a 2022 report by the Victorian Agency for Health Information that suggested IVF clinics might be under-reporting dangerous incidents.

In the midst of these concerns our former fertility regulator, the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority, or VARTA, was tasked with undertaking a review. Unfortunately, late last year the Victorian government decided to wind up the regulator and transfer many of these responsibilities to the Department of Health. We opposed the legislation for this change. No-one could explain to us why this change was necessary. The legislation did pass, and VARTA was dissolved. We remain concerned that the Department of Health is not equipped to deliver a similar level of wraparound services. As a donor-conceived person myself, if a service provider like VARTA had been available to me and my family, I believe my experience would have been very different.

I was also deeply troubled by the timing of this change. This major shake-up was being proposed at the same time the Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand was calling for a national reform to ensure uniform regulation of fertility care, including IVF. Federal health minister Mark Butler said if re-elected their government would ensure the regulation of IVF was on the agenda at the next health minister meeting. Well, the election has come and gone, and their government has had a resounding re-election. Now it is time to fix the dangerous patchwork regulation of IVF in this country. So I ask: will the minister advocate to ensure that the regulation of IVF is on the national agenda?

#### **Greenvale Reservoir Park**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:22): (1625) My adjournment is to the Minister for Environment, and it concerns the Greenvale Reservoir Park in my electorate. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the desperately needed reopening of the park. Despite Labor's spin and empty promises, we do not really know when it will occur. It has been over 3000 days

since your government promised \$1.4 million to upgrade the Greenvale Reservoir Park, but the park still remains behind padlocks. I recently took the Shadow Minister for Environment, the member for Sandringham, to the Greenvale Reservoir Park to see it firsthand – in fact to the Somerton Road entrance of the Greenvale Reservoir Park, which is behind padlocks. This is the same Somerton Road entrance that the government – Ms Spence and Ms D'Ambrosio – said in a 2017 media release would receive \$1.4 million to upgrade that entrance. Now, the state of that entrance, with overgrown weeds and dumped rubbish, does not look very upgraded to me.

The Liberals and Nationals know that communities like Greenvale deserve access to facilities to recreate, enjoy time with their families and use the facilities. Many in the community have great memories, like I do from when I was a kid, of going to the Greenvale Reservoir Park for family barbecues, for festivals and for cultural days. Many in our multicultural communities loved going there and have great memories of going there. It was closed for dam wall reconstruction works in 2014 and never reopened, despite promises. There was that \$1.4 million promise, which seemed to go nowhere. Then we had the member for the neglectorate of Greenvale going out with the Minister for Water and promising \$3 million last year to reopen the park, like it was new funding. What happened to the \$1.4 million?

The action I seek from the Minister for Environment is to answer what happened to the \$1.4 million announced by his predecessor in 2017, because it seems to have gone missing. Is that now included in the \$3 million that is required to reopen the park? The community deserves answers.

I see many on the Labor side of politics – and fair enough – speaking about the federal election result. None of them seem to be speaking about the federal election result in this part of the world, in the seat of Calwell, where Labor received an almost 15 per cent swing against them. There was a very similar result to 2022, a 15.5 per cent swing against them. The action I seek from the Minister for Environment is for the government to explain itself on its 2017 promise that has not been fulfilled.

### Extremism

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:25): (1626) The adjournment matter I have this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for her to urgently implement the remaining recommendations of the 2022 inquiry into extremism in Victoria. Premier, we are seeing a disturbing upward trend towards far-right extremism fuelled by division and distrust, and Victoria is not immune to these acts of violence. In just the last few months alone we have seen neo-Nazis disrupt the Anzac Day dawn service, booing Uncle Mark Brown's Welcome to Country; white supremacists disrupting and intimidating people attending refugee and asylum seeker rallies; neo-Nazi boot camps in Elwood training men, including minors, for combat; anti-trans activists taking their hatred to the streets; and neo-Nazis holding anti-black, anti-Asian and Islamophobic banners on the Monash Freeway before the election.

In other jurisdictions, like New South Wales, the community resilience approach to countering extremism is premised on the concept that this issue is a social issue with security implications, not a security issue with social implications, indicating that engagement with communities is fundamental to protecting young people from radicalisation.

Researcher Jordan McSwiney has warned that the far right in Australia are the most active, visible and organised they have ever been. Concerningly, there are reports that the neo-Nazis are trying to form their own political party to legitimise their bigotry and increase their reach.

While we welcome the recent expansion of protected attributes under the anti-vilification laws and acknowledge these reforms are an important step towards justice against extremist discrimination, there is still more work to be done. The parliamentary inquiry into extremism in Victoria heard how sophisticated the far right are at indoctrinating and recruiting young people, exploiting economic inequality, institutional distrust, social isolation and prejudices in the community to pull people into their extremist groups. To stop right-wing extremism at the prevention level we need to fix the key

drivers, like poverty, social exclusion, lack of opportunity and technological structures that allow disinformation and misinformation to proliferate. Premier, given the global challenges posed by extremism, we can no longer delay implementing the remaining recommendations of the extremism inquiry from 2022.

### Weed and pest control

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:28): (1627) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment to ensure adequate funding in the upcoming budget for vital weed and pest control in regional Victoria. There have been recent cuts to Parks Victoria's budget which directly impact weed and pest control, including rabbits. A \$95 million government cut to Parks Victoria's budget has also exacerbated the risk of poorly controlled weed and pest populations spilling out of parks onto neighbouring farmers' land. We know that high rabbit populations can exacerbate drought conditions. The *Weekly Times* first reported in October last year that Parks Victoria had almost halved the 111 services it carries out across 4.12 million hectares of public land. This meant direct cuts to rabbit and fox control, rubbish collection and educational programs. Media coverage of the cuts led to a review of Parks Victoria in November last year, which was due to be completed last month. This left the future of the staff and the services they deliver in limbo. Also left in limbo are the rural communities who do not know how this will affect their businesses and communities.

The *Weekly Times* also reported that the Allan Labor government has created enormous uncertainty for sheep producers with its on-again off-again wild dog policies. Farmers were left not knowing if control measures would come to an end for most of last year. Adding to the challenge, experts have warned that rabbit populations are poised to explode in coming years, as there are currently no new biocontrol agents in the pipeline and resistance to calicivirus is building in rabbit populations. Without adequate funding for coordinated control, we risk seeing widespread environmental degradation, soil erosion and loss of productivity on both public and private land. At the same time wild dogs continue to wreak havoc on livestock, killing lambs and calves and undermining the viability of farming businesses. Without a reliable and well-resourced dog control program, farmers are left to bear the costs of government inaction.

I urge the minister to provide clarity and allocate funding in the state budget for weed and pest control across Victoria to ensure that our farmers, regional communities and the natural environment are not left to suffer the consequences.

### Health services

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (18:30): (1628) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is for Victoria's local public health units to have guaranteed funding in the long term. Uncertainty has been brewing about the status of public health units that were stood up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It begs the question: what is going on with the state of health in Victoria? Since the widespread investment into public health in response to the pandemic in 2019, the government seems to have returned disease prevention to the bottom of the to-do list. The need for a sustained and robust public health system is in no way reduced and in fact has never been more important. While we are not currently experiencing a worldwide pandemic, the next one may only be around the corner, with a terrifying avian flu outbreak currently wreaking havoc across many species around the globe. On a globalised planet experiencing rapid climate change, the question regarding a future pandemic is not if, it is when.

In my own electorate of Western Victoria childhood vaccination rates across half of the local government areas have fallen below the rate required for herd immunity. It reflects a national trend where coverage rates for all children at the age of one is on the decline. In the meantime we are facing a significant measles outbreak. Victoria has recorded 27 cases this year, bringing our national total to over 60 cases, which is already more than recorded throughout the entirety of last year. Australia is not alone. Declining vaccination rates overseas in countries such as the US are causing similarly unprecedented outbreaks.

Then there are other serious and previously well-contained infectious diseases rearing their heads in our communities. I have raised this one before: there were four cases of congenital syphilis in Victoria in 2023, compared to a total of two in the 25 years prior to 2017. Other sexually transmitted diseases are on the increase as well, like chlamydia and gonorrhoea. In the meantime we are still without a chief health officer, and the sentiment lingers: why has it been such a difficult position to recruit for? It might have something to do with the state of the Department of Health, which has faced the brunt of public sector cuts over the past two years, or it might have something to do with the fact that this government is more interested in announcing new hospitals than it is in committing to long-term primary and preventative health initiatives like the public health units.

During both budget estimates in 2023 the then health secretary Euan Wallace highlighted the government's commitment to public health units and their role in managing our response to over 80 communicable diseases. Minister, what has changed?

### Homelessness

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:33): (1629) My adjournment is for the Minister for Youth, and some of the issues I am going to be raising before I ask for my action are homelessness, the vulnerability and potential and actual abuse concerns and the need for greater policy in this area. Minister for Youth, the action I seek from you is for you to acknowledge and put into place an overarching strategy to protect and provide appropriate supportive and safe accommodation to address youth homelessness both in and outside of residential care in Victoria, ensuring that vulnerable young people are not left homeless or are not abused, especially if they are in Victorian state care. The Allan Labor government is failing in its overarching strategy or plan to address youth homelessness in Victoria, because the fact is each night there are more than 6000 young people sleeping in our streets. According to the Victorian Youth Homelessness Assembly more than 16,000 young people aged 15 to 24 sought help from the Victorian homelessness services last year, and more than 11,000 of them presented alone – that is right, they had no adult or carer with them. In the case of 15- and 16-year-olds this is such an indictment. And what about the young people who are younger than 15? Our most vulnerable group – our children and youth – has been inexcusably let down by this government, which focuses on building an unwanted Suburban Rail Loop rather than using funds to prioritise the protection of our children.

I recently had the privilege of meeting with staff at Berry Street in Narre Warren. It is an amazing organisation, and I commend all the staff – the welfare workers, the teachers and the leadership – for the tremendous work that they are doing. It is there to assist children, young people and families who are experiencing poverty, violence and abuse through special supported education that provides for their additional needs. Their mandate is to help young people experiencing homelessness and abuse to feel safe so that they can have a learning environment where they can actually receive some sense of hope and secure a better future.

We know that vulnerable children and young people removed from their homes and placed in residential care continue to face horrific exposure to sexual abuse due to this government's failure and chronic underfunding and lack of intervention and oversight – I will add that too. Last year the Commission for Children and Young People revealed that in just one year 160 incidents were reported, with 85 children in residential care being victims of child prostitution, as reported by my colleague Ms Britnell in the other place and in her recent media release.

Berry Street, as you know, began in 1877 when a group – *(Time expired)*

### National parks

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:36): (1630) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the government to finally introduce the legislation to create the Wombat–Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees national parks. It has been six years since the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) recommended a major

expansion of national and regional parks in central Victoria and four years since the government announced they would protect over 65,000 hectares of forest – what the government then proudly described as the largest expansion of our forest reserve system in our state’s history. Today members in this place tried to paint support for new national parks as confined to the inner city, completely dismissing the many, many local regional community groups who have been campaigning for better forest protection for decades. The attempts to turn this into yet another culture war is simply disgraceful.

Communities have been waiting 47 months for the government to finally act on their promise. This is the longest time it has taken for any Victorian government to gazette new parks this century. Last year the government promised legislation would be introduced by the end of the year, but we are all still waiting. These areas contain over 360 native plants and 180 native animals. There are at least 25 rare, vulnerable or threatened plant species and 15 threatened native animals. Victoria is facing an extension crisis. Our wildlife just simply cannot wait. The endangered brush-tailed phascogales, greater gliders and rare plants like the wombat bossiaea cannot wait any longer. Since VEAC first delivered its report the list of endangered species has only continued to grow.

Despite what other members may have claimed today, Victorians support new national parks. Independent polling has shown that 80 per cent of Victorians support the creation of new national parks. Victoria’s national parks are an economic asset. They contribute over \$2 billion to the state economy each year and provide tens of thousands of jobs. An independent economic assessment showed that, at the very least, new national parks for Victoria’s central west will return between four times to double the economic return on investment. The longer this delay continues, the more damage is done to our forests, to our wildlife and to the public’s trust.

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Purcell, I am sorry, your action was to introduce legislation. Is that –

**Georgie PURCELL:** Yes, for them to honour their commitment to introducing the legislation.

**The PRESIDENT:** Just so it falls within the standing orders, can your action be that you get an update on the progress?

**Georgie PURCELL:** That would be fantastic.

**Lizzie Blandthorn:** On a point of order, President, I think we have another matter to square off, President, so perhaps a point of order might be the most appropriate. Mrs Hermans’s matter raised an action from the Minister for Youth. She canvassed areas very widely, including some of my own, and I am more than happy to dispel the myths she just propagated. But certainly the matters that she raised fall across various portfolios other than those that, under the general orders, would be the responsibility of the Minister for Youth. I would suggest that whether her adjournment matter is actually in order should be reconsidered.

**The PRESIDENT:** Which portfolio do you believe it would be best put to?

**Lizzie Blandthorn:** For the part that is relevant to me, if Mrs Hermans would like to direct her adjournment to me, I would be happy to answer that now. But I genuinely could not follow, other than the range of issues canvassed, who it was for, but it certainly was not for the Minister for Youth.

**The PRESIDENT:** Of course an adjournment matter can only go to one minister. If it went to that minister, the response to the adjournment could be, ‘There are a number of things outside my remit, but this particular issue is not, and I’ll respond to that.’

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** Further to the point of order, President, as you know, I did not get to finish everything that I had on there. But the issue is that a lot of young people, youth, are very vulnerable, and when they are out of home, even if they are under-age and even if they are in the state’s care, if they are considered homeless and they are not in residential care, they actually are told that this is an

issue that goes to Homes Victoria. I think the issue needs to go to the youth side of things, because we need to address the fact that we need the funding for these programs.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am happy with that. If it is directed to the Minister for Youth, it will get a response that way.

### Responses

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (18:41): Ms Terpstra raised a matter for the Minister for Industrial Relations. Mr Luu raised a matter for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. Mr Limbrick raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health. Ms Ermacora raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development. Ms Crozier raised a matter for the Minister for Health, as did Ms Payne and also Dr Mansfield. Mrs Tyrrell raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Ms Watt raised a matter for the Premier, as did Ms Gray-Barberio. Ms Lovell raised a matter for the Treasurer. Ms Copsey also raised a matter for the Premier. Mrs McArthur raised a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Mr Mulholland, Mrs Broad and Ms Purcell raised matters for the Minister for Environment. And Mrs Hermans has directed her matter to the Minister for Youth. I will refer accordingly.

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

**House adjourned 6:43 pm.**