

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 18 June 2025

CONTENTS

ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Fijian delegation	1
PETITIONS	
Residential planning zones	1
PAPERS	
Papers	1
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Department of Treasury and Finance	2
Upfield rail line	2
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
First Nations soldiers	2
Regional Victoria	2
Refugee Week	3
Western suburbs transport infrastructure	3
Animal welfare	3
Flooding Creek Linear Reserve	4
OzHarvest	4
Women in Film and Television	4
Southern Metropolitan Region schools	5
Walk for Truth	5
BILLS	
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025	5
Statement of compatibility	5
Second reading	8
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Planning scheme amendments	11
Early childhood education and care	16
MOTIONS	
Drought	20
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Women in sport	34
Public sector review	34
Ministers statements: child protection	35
Waste and recycling management	36
Government contracts	36
Ministers statements: drought	37
Kids Helpline	37
Suburban Rail Loop	39
Ministers statements: housing	40
Western suburbs truck traffic	40
Prison workplace safety	41
Ministers statements: Victorian Homebuyer Fund	42
Written responses	43
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	43
Eastern Victoria Region	43
Southern Metropolitan Region	44
Western Victoria Region	44
Northern Metropolitan Region	44
Northern Victoria Region	44
Southern Metropolitan Region	44
Northern Victoria Region	45
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	45
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	45
Western Metropolitan Region	45
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	46
Eastern Victoria Region	46
Western Victoria Region	46
Northern Victoria Region	46
MOTIONS	
Drought	47
Health services	50

CONTENTS

SBS headquarters.....	67
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion and orders of the day	82
BILLS	
Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025.....	82
Royal assent	82
STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS	
Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board.....	83
Report 2023–24	83
Department of Treasury and Finance	84
Budget papers 2025–26	84
Department of Treasury and Finance	84
Budget papers 2025–26	84
Department of Treasury and Finance	86
Budget papers 2025–26	86
Melbourne Polytechnic	87
Report 2024.....	87
Department of Health.....	88
Review of the Operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.....	88
PETITIONS	
Barry Beach marine terminal	89
ADJOURNMENT	
Early childhood education and care.....	92
Public broadcasters.....	92
Refugees and asylum seekers	93
Warrnambool tech school	93
Sentinel events	94
Kangaroo control	94
Boat ramps	95
Fire services.....	95
Metro Tunnel	96
Roadside vegetation	96
Hobsons Bay City Council	96
Returned and Services League of Australia	97
Bowel cancer.....	97
Foster carers	98
Upper Beaconsfield Recreation Reserve.....	98
Western Metropolitan Region level crossing removals.....	99
Northern Victoria Region road safety	99
Responses	99

Wednesday 18 June 2025

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

*Announcements***Fijian delegation**

The PRESIDENT (09:34): Before we commence today's proceedings I wish to acknowledge in the gallery the honourable Speaker Jitoko of the Parliament of Fiji, who is leading a delegation of parliamentary members and staff. You are very welcome. We have a great parliamentary sister relationship between the Victorian Parliament and Fiji. They are going to be here all week. They will learn a bit from us and we will learn a bit from them, like we usually do.

I would like to mention that the Speaker has held a number of high-level roles. He was actually a High Court judge before coming to be the Speaker. I do not know if he has set the bar too high now. These guys have to live with an electrician. But as I said, we learn a lot from each other, and we are really grateful that you can be here.

*Petitions***Residential planning zones**

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 16 signatures:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, respectfully urge the Legislative Council to note:

- the Allan Labor government has announced 10 high-rise high-density zones in the municipalities of Bayside, Boroondara, Brighton, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington, Whitehorse and Whittlesea where planning rights will be stripped from councils and communities, high rise development will occur as of right and planning control will be exercised undemocratically by the state government;
- that, in addition to a central activity district with as of right 12 storey development, these zones contain enormous "catchment areas" where planning protections will be removed, where 3 and 6 storey development can occur as of right, where municipal heritage overlays and designations will be overridden resulting in the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable heritage properties and where canopy tree protections will be overridden resulting in the loss of neighbourhood amenity and the exacerbation of heat island effects; and
- these plans are not accompanied by proper health or education service plans or plans for additional open space despite proposed massively increased local populations.

We therefore call on the state government to desist and recommence proper discussions and consultation with local communities and councils and heritage peak bodies in all 10 affected zones prior to taking any further planning actions to implement the announced high-rise high-density zones.

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General –

Annual Plan, 2025–26.

Contractors and Consultants: Management, June 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 39 and 57.

Production of documents

Department of Treasury and Finance

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 15 June 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 14 May 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to departmental briefings provided to the Treasurer. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Upfield rail line

The Clerk: I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 15 June 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 14 May 2025 on the motion of Ms Gray-Barberio relating to documents relating to the findings of the Upfield, Somerton and Wallan service enhancement planning feasibility study. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Members statements

First Nations soldiers

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (09:38): I rise to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of John Bugge from Geelong Legacy and the Portarlington and St Leonards RSL sub-branch for his deep commitment to honouring the service of First Nations soldiers. Through tireless research and heartfelt action, John is helping to ensure the courageous service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in every conflict is never forgotten.

One story stands out, and that is of the Saunders family, proud Gunditjmara people of western Victoria. Captain Reg Saunders became Australia's first commissioned Aboriginal officer. His father Christopher served in World War I. Reg's brother Harry served in the 2/14th Infantry Battalion and made the ultimate sacrifice during the Kokoda campaign in 1942. This Anzac Day, with the blessings of Reg's grandson, John travelled from Geelong to lay a wreath at Harry's grave at Bomana War Cemetery in Port Moresby, supported by his local RSL. John's work is a powerful act of remembrance and reconciliation.

Closer to home, the Heywood Indigenous war memorial water tower, north of Portland, features a striking mural honouring First Nations service in both world wars, including four Lovett brothers – Frederick, Herbert, Edward and Leonard – and Reg Saunders. This year marks 110 years since Gallipoli, a time to honour all who served, reflect on their families' sacrifice and uphold the values that continue to bring us together. And of course the name Lovett will be represented by a number of people who have walked from Portland to Melbourne. They will be on the steps of Parliament today – a proud history.

Regional Victoria

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (09:39): I rise to express the growing frustration felt by many regional Victorians who believe this Labor government is increasingly out of touch with communities outside Melbourne. Whether it is the planned VNI West transmission project that threatens to carve through prime agricultural land or the Cooba solar factory proceeding despite minimal community consultation and widespread local opposition, rural people are being left out of decisions that directly affect their lives and livelihoods. The voices of country communities are being ignored, and it is clear

that many feel they are being forgotten. I remind the Premier of the words she delivered in her maiden speech to this Parliament on 3 November 1999. She said:

I believe strongly in the role and rights of the community in the decision-making process. However, for community members to play a role we as legislators must ensure that they have the opportunity to participate ...

... the best decisions are made after members of the community have had the opportunity to participate and had their ideas and concerns listened to and given due recognition.

Premier Allan made a commitment that day to represent regional voices. But after 25 years in this place and now leading the government, many of her own constituents feel abandoned. It is time to return to that original promise to govern for the whole of the state, not just Melbourne. Regional communities deserve to be heard, respected and properly represented in the decisions that affect their daily lives.

Refugee Week

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:41): This week is Refugee Week, and I have been honoured to celebrate with my community, honouring their resilience and strength and the contributions of people from refugee backgrounds. This year's theme 'Finding freedom: diversity in community' is a powerful reminder of how inclusive, welcoming communities can help people not just survive but thrive. From a vibrant celebration in Broadmeadows hosted by Hume City Council featuring music, dance, food, art and cultural performances to an action-packed conference hosted by the Vietnamese Community in Australia, it has been a joy to connect with the incredible diversity across my electorate. These events showcase the rich cultures, traditions and stories that refugee communities bring and the vital role they play in shaping our shared future. While we celebrate these contributions, it is also important to acknowledge the ongoing challenges many refugees still face, from navigating complex settlement systems to experiencing racism, trauma or barriers to employment, education and housing. In light of recent events involving far-right groups promoting hate and division, I want to say clearly: refugees are welcome here. Refugees are an integral part of Victoria's story, and we must continue to stand against racism and fear with unity, compassion and action. This week and every week let us keep building communities where everyone belongs.

Western suburbs transport infrastructure

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:42): The Allan Labor government has always had a very strong record when it comes to investing in transport infrastructure in Melbourne's growing west, and we are not slowing down. The 2025–26 budget will make a massive investment of almost \$5 billion in our rail network to run more trains more often for passengers across the network, including more frequent services on the Werribee line. This investment will also operationalise the Metro Tunnel, opening later this year and delivering turn-up-and-go services for the busy Sunbury line – I cannot wait for this to open; it is amazing – reducing waiting times and improving safety and accessibility.

Backed by a \$2 billion investment from our re-elected partners in Canberra, the Albanese Labor government, we are getting on with delivering the Melbourne airport rail with works to start on the Sunshine station redevelopment. This project will include signalling upgrades, new and upgraded tracks, new regional platforms and a combination of flyovers and underpasses to untangle what is a very complex rail junction. The Allan Labor government is focused on what matters, and that is why we are cutting congestion for families and workers in our growing western suburbs. I cannot wait to see these projects realised.

Animal welfare

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:44): I rise to speak about a new report by Animal-Free Science Advocacy, *Evaluating Animal Research Oversight in Australia*, which shines a light on the hidden suffering of animals used in research and education. It reveals that current ethical review

processes led by animal ethics committees are outdated and often fail to question whether animals should be used at all. Instead the focus remains on managing harm rather than preventing it altogether. Animals, who we of course know are sentient and are capable of pain, are routinely subject to experiments even when humane non-animal alternatives are available. This report challenges the long-held assumption that animal research is essential and highlights what many in the scientific and medical community have been saying for decades: that animal-based research is unethical and is scientifically flawed and that we are falling behind on investment into modern alternatives.

Animals are justified as test subjects because they are considered biologically similar to humans, yet their differences are used to excuse inhumane practices and unreliable results. I want to thank Animal-Free Science Advocacy for their tireless work in challenging this status quo and setting out a clear, evidence-based pathway forward. I hope that we can all listen, because by doing so Australia can take a leadership role in compassionate, ethical research that values both human progress and the lives of animals.

Flooding Creek Linear Reserve

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:45): Last week I met with Wellington shire mayor Scott Rossetti at Flooding Creek linear reserve in Sale to see where an additional 3 hectares of native trees and grasses will be planted. Whether it is school students, passionate land carers or the local shire, for years locals have been hard at work planting native species, and Flooding Creek is already seeing the benefits. The Allan Labor government is supporting them with more than \$280,000 through our Green Links program so volunteers and workers can plant more than 25,000 plants on the 3.3 hectares of what is becoming greener and greener space. We are also building more pedestrian pathways, making this natural area more accessible to locals. Whether those in homes nearby are getting out on their bikes or getting out on their feet, they are able to get out there with their families and friends, and for generations they are going to be able to enjoy this area.

Thanks again to land carers from the Maffra & District Landcare Network for their relentless efforts in removing and treating weeds and tackling pest species. Flooding Creek is an area with high biodiversity value, on the Thomson River, and this work to restore the wildlife corridor is incredibly valued. As I said, locals getting out of those houses which surround it are going to be able to enjoy that area for generations to come.

OzHarvest

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:47): Last week I had the pleasure of attending the launch of OzHarvest's south-east hub. It was fantastic to tour the facility, meet the passionate team and hear firsthand about their vital work. I also connected with many of the local charities and service providers who receive meals from OzHarvest. The new hub will support these charities by delivering 6000 extra meals each week to in-need communities across the south-east. It was confronting to learn that 31 per cent are people facing food insecurity have never needed assistance before. Working families, students and older Victorians are among those now struggling to put food on the table. I encourage everyone to support OzHarvest's Giving Day, which so happens to fall today, 18 June. All donations will be matched to double the impact. Together we can help them reach their 3 million meal goal. Thank you to OzHarvest and all of their supporters, volunteers and partners for their commitment to fighting food insecurity in our community.

Women in Film and Television

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:48): My members statement is for the non-profit organisation in my community of Southern Metro known as Women in Film and Television. Last Saturday, not far from my office, they held an event at the St Kilda town hall. Shifting the Gaze was held to promote some of the best female-led stories from right across Australia. Attendees also had the opportunity to engage in a question-and-answer format with the filmmakers afterwards.

It is events like these that make Victoria, and in particular my community of Southern Metro, the film capital of Australia, which is the place to be in culture. Whether it is attracting Liam Neeson for blockbuster films or producing some of the world's best actors and actresses, we have it all. Last year the creative industries in Victoria, which includes the film industry, contributed a combined \$41.4 billion to the state's economy. The film and television industry specifically contributed around \$1.3 billion of its own, employing more than 10,000 Victorians.

But art is more than just money; the arts are essential to Australian life and culture. I pay tribute to Women in Film and Television for their key role in promoting women's contributions in our creative life. I encourage everyone in my community who is interested to visit their website, and if they are free, to jump on their networking and professional development opportunities for women in the sector.

Southern Metropolitan Region schools

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:49): Victoria is the Education State, and the Labor government continues to invest in local schools, ensuring our kids have access to the best facilities for their learning. The recent budget delivered on this for the Southern Metropolitan Region. I had the pleasure of revealing that not one, not two but three primary schools are in receipt of funding in this budget to build new infrastructure, including gymnasiums and classrooms. I recently visited Gardenvale Primary School with the Minister for Education, which has been allocated \$9.8 million for significant upgrades to block A at the school, giving students and staff modern learning and work spaces. Hampton Primary School has been awarded \$11.7 million for upgrades, including a new gymnasium and classrooms, and Caulfield South Primary School, another excellent school in the region, has been awarded \$9 million to build a new gymnasium, which will give their students access to better physical education facilities and a space to continue their music and performing arts. This Labor government is giving our kids the best opportunities to learn by building better school infrastructure.

Walk for Truth

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:50): Today I am standing here as one of the first and few First Nations people ever elected to the Victorian state Parliament, and it is a place that not so long ago was the epicentre of some of the most harmful and destructive laws to my community that have ever existed in Australian history – laws that systematically devastated Victoria's First Nations people, our culture and our community. We have come a long, long way from that, but we still have a long road ahead of us, and it is a road that we must walk together. No-one has shown more the importance of this work than Yoorrook commissioner Travis Lovett, who later today will walk up to the front steps of this place after his journey from Portland to signify the end of years of hard work, hard conversations and even harder truths. I cannot begin to express my respect, gratitude and deep solidarity to all those involved in Yoorrook, and I acknowledge the strength and determination of all those involved who went and shared their stories, their experiences and most importantly the pain that they felt as individuals, as families, as community and as culture. I am proud to be able to mark such a significant step in my community's journey to self-determination in this place later today, one that we will all, I hope, walk together.

Bills

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:52): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The main purpose of the bill is to amend the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to establish a right to adequate housing within the Charter.

Human Rights Issues

In my opinion, the right to adequate housing is a fundamental prerequisite for the realisation of many of the human rights already protected by the Charter. The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to (and strengthened by) the bill are:

- The right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- The right to life (section 9)
- The right to protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (section 10)
- The right to freedom from forced work (section 11)
- The right to freedom of movement (section 12)
- The right to privacy and reputation (section 13)
- The right to protection of families and children (section 17)
- The right to take part in public life (section 18)
- Cultural rights (section 19)
- Property rights (section 20)
- The right to liberty and security of person (section 21)

The right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. This means that you cannot be treated unfavourably because of your personal characteristics protected by the law.

Introducing a right to adequate housing that sufficiently accommodates the person's attributes, within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (new s 12A(2)(b)(vi)) strengthens this right by affirming that housing should be fully accessible to all free from discrimination.

The right to life (section 9)

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Introducing a right for every person to adequate housing that provides for the person's safety (new s 12A(2)(b)(iv)), and security of tenure (new s 12A(2)(c)) would strengthen this right, as inadequate housing can directly impact the right to life. For example, living in unsafe or unsanitary conditions can lead to health problems and increased vulnerability to disease. Homelessness can expose individuals to violence, crime, and other risks, potentially leading to loss of life.

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women, and lack of access to safe housing creates an enormous hurdle that prevents many women and their children from escaping violence that can lead to loss of life.

Enshrining and fulfilling the right to adequate housing not only strengthens the right to life, but it is crucial for protecting the right to life.

Enshrining a right to adequate housing in the Charter would come with an obligation for public authorities to uphold this right. This shifts issues such as homelessness from being treated as a matter of charity or crisis response to a breach of a legal obligation.

The right to protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (section 10), The right to liberty and security of person (section 21)

Homelessness violates a number of human rights contained within the Charter, including security of person (Section 21) and protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Section 10). Introducing a right for every person to adequate housing would also strengthen these rights.

The right to freedom from forced work (section 11)

Section 11(2) of the Charter provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour. Introducing a right to adequate housing enhances the right to freedom from forced work, as homelessness and inadequate or unsafe housing can impact on the ability to avoid coerced or forced work.

The right to freedom of movement (section 12)

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria and to enter and leave it and has the freedom to choose where to live.

The bill creates a right to adequate housing that is located reasonably close to public services and employment opportunities for the person (new s 12A(2)(b)(vii)). In my view, this will enhance and not limit the operation of the right to freedom of movement. What is adequate for the person will differ from person to person. The bill ensures that people will not be forced to relocate to housing that is poorly located or removed from their work and communities, while still protecting the freedom of a person to choose where to live.

The right to privacy and reputation (section 13)

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. The new Charter right to housing in the bill enhances this right by defining adequate housing as housing that provides for safety (new s 12A(2)(b)(iv)), and sufficient space for a person (new s 12A(2)(b)(v)).

The right to protection of families and children (section 17)

Section 17 of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child.

The new Charter right to housing in the bill enhances this right by outlining that adequate housing includes housing that provides sufficient space (new s 12A(2)(b)(v)). Living in overcrowded housing puts children at an increased risk of emotional and behavioural problems and reduced school performance.

The new Charter right to housing in the bill enhances the right to protection of families and children further by outlining that adequate housing includes housing that is affordable (new s 12A(2)(b)(i)).

Children in lower-income households where housing costs amount to more than 30% of household income are considered to be in housing stress, and are at risk of adverse health and wellbeing outcomes.

Housing stress in turn can impact parental mental health and reduce funds available to spend on food, healthcare and education. Housing affordability is often associated with better health, academic achievement and school engagement for children.

The new Charter right to housing in the bill also enhances the right to protection of families and children by outlining that adequate housing includes housing that provides for the person's safety (new s 12A(2)(b)(iv)), and where the person is protected against unfair eviction (new s 12A(2)(d)). For children who are experiencing homelessness or who are living in insecure housing, the lack of a secure and permanent home can interrupt their schooling and negatively impact their health and wellbeing.

The right to take part in public life (section 18)

Section 18(2)(a) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to take part in public life, including the right to vote in state and local council elections and the right to access public services. Without proof of residency, people experiencing homelessness and insecure housing encounter barriers to voting and participating in civic life. Introducing a right for every person to adequate housing therefore strengthens the right to take part in public life.

Cultural rights (section 19)

Section 19 of the Charter provides that all persons with a particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background must not be denied the right, in community with other persons of that background, to enjoy their culture, to declare and practise their religion and to use their language.

Introducing a right to adequate housing that sufficiently accommodates the person's attributes, within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (new s 12A(2)(b)(vi)) and that provides for cultural adequacy (new s 12A(2)(e)) strengthens this right by affirming that housing should be fully accessible to all and free from discrimination, including taking into account a person's cultural needs.

Property rights (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. Introducing a right to adequate housing that protects against unfair eviction (new s 12A(2)(d)) improves the operation of this right. It prevents a person from being unfairly evicted from their

home but does not limit the right of a property owner to manage a residential tenancy agreement, as it retains the ability for eviction in accordance with the law.

There is an international consensus that housing is a fundamental human right. It is found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as other human rights treaties ratified by almost all national governments around the world. At the national level, the right to housing is recognised in Australia's National Action Plan on Human Rights. In the international human rights context, the concept of a right to adequate housing is found in article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Australia signed the ICESCR in 1973 and ratified it without reservations in 1975. The right to housing is more than simply a right to shelter. It is a right to have somewhere to live that is adequate. As outlined in the ICESCR, whether housing is adequate depends on a range of factors, including those outlined in new s 12A(2)(b).

The right to adequate housing not only strengthens many existing rights within the Charter, but including this right in our Charter would bring it further into alignment with international human rights law. This would ensure greater consistency, a more inclusive and equitable legal framework, promote policy coherence and help courts and tribunals interpret rights using globally accepted principles.

Therefore, in my opinion this Bill strengthens the Charter. For these reasons I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter.

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Second reading

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:52): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

It is with great hope and urgency today that I introduce this important bill, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025, into the Victorian Parliament.

This is a bill for the right to housing to be enshrined in Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Currently our governments and systems treat housing as a commodity to be bought, sold and invested in. The result? Ongoing homelessness, housing and rental crises.

Housing is at the heart of so much that connects us, our family and our communities. Housing impacts our access to health, education and work. Shelter is a basic necessity, like food, water, health care and education. Everyone needs a place to live in order to participate fully in society, to feel secure, to be able to work or volunteer, to build families and cultivate connections in their communities.

But for too many Victorians, a stable and secure home is out of reach. More than 120,000 people are on the state's public housing waiting list. Let me repeat that: 120,000 people. There has been no real investment for public housing by successive Labor and Liberal governments in decades, and much of our existing housing stock is suffering from deliberate neglect.

In this country, since the 1980s, housing has been viewed by policymakers as 'primarily as a commodity to be traded and as a vehicle for wealth creation'. This perspective has, above all else, been the main contributor to our current interrelated homelessness, housing and rental crises. And these are all, fundamentally, human rights crises – a deliberate and systematic withholding of the basics necessary for a decent life.

At the federal level, Labor and the Liberals seem more than happy with the status quo. Tax handouts to wealthy property investors, such as negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount, are on track to skyrocket to over \$180 billion over the next 10 years. And we know these tax handouts play a major part in pushing up house prices.

It appears that on this issue, the federal government, a Labor government – a party that long ago was a champion of the disadvantaged in this country – refuse to do anything other than tinker while the wealthy get wealthier at the expense of everyday people's basic rights, and the right to housing is no exception.

And so too here, for decades, Victorian governments have neglected public housing and homelessness services. State Labor might concede that they're now trying to play catch-up on housing, but they are nonetheless still selling off public housing and public land to property developers. Instead, we ought to be putting people first and building publicly owned homes by the tens of thousands; this is what we desperately need in order to house people in need and protect people from the ever-increasing savagery of the private rental market.

Just like public health and public education, governments have a responsibility to intervene in ambitious and concrete ways to ensure that everyone, no matter their circumstances, has access to a safe and secure place to call home.

Yet successive governments continue to create, contribute to and at best do nothing about the circumstances that mean that fewer and fewer people are living in housing conditions that align with their human rights and their dignity.

We have people who are every day threatened with forced eviction and the risk of homelessness. Compared to many countries in Europe, the protections we offer tenants are dismal. Discrimination in the housing sphere is rampant, as is the degree of access people have to basic housing-related support services. Under this government we have had attempts at reform, but little to no real enforcement of the minimum standards and protections that were already on the books. At best we see some gentle slaps on the wrists on only the most outrageous perpetrators of assaults on tenants rights – leaving most of the dodgy landlords and developers unfazed.

Homelessness and crisis services are at their limits, with demand surging. The number of owner-occupiers experiencing mortgage stress is at record highs, as is the number of people in rental stress. With many young adults locked out of buying their first home, the age now of the average first home buyer has gone from 26 in the mid-2000s to 36 today.

This year, the average price of an Australian home surpassed the \$1 million mark. 'Housing affordability' is now an oxymoron. Mortgage affordability is tracking near its worst level in history.

People in insecure or unsafe housing often find themselves having to sacrifice other necessities – like food, medication, school uniforms – to keep a roof over their heads. Too many people, particularly children and young people, are forced into exploitative and dangerous situations and relationships to maintain their access to shelter.

Everyday people are being crunched between rapidly increasing housing prices, underinvestment in public and affordable housing, real-term reduction in welfare benefits, an epidemic of family and domestic violence and the lack of options outside the private market for those on low incomes.

Victoria has the lowest proportion of public and community housing in the country, and demand is only expected to grow in the coming years.

Let us talk about women. Women – particularly single mothers and older women – are now the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness, with 45 per cent identifying family and domestic violence as the cause. At the same time, we have victims of family violence and other priority applicants on the housing waitlist who find themselves waiting for over 17 months for social housing. That should alarm all of us.

Anglicare's 2025 rental affordability snapshot, released in April, showed that there are no properties in Victoria that are affordable for a single person receiving youth allowance or JobSeeker, including share houses.

The cherry on top? This government wants to demolish all 44 public housing towers in our state. This will displace more than 10,000 residents from their homes, tearing communities apart, taking us deeper down the path of privatisation. This plan will make the housing crisis worse.

But we have a choice here. We are in such privileged positions in this place. And that comes with great responsibility. We need to start thinking differently about housing, reframing decisions about housing through the lens of social need rather than private profit.

A key recommendation from the Victorian Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into homelessness in Victoria report was for the Victorian government to 'include the right to housing in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act'.

This report was tabled in March 2021, four years ago. The government responded, saying that this recommendation was 'under review'.

A recommendation from the Victorian Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria report was 'That the Victorian Government investigate enshrining ... the right to housing in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights, including considering advice from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner.' This was tabled in November 2023. The government responded that this recommendation was also 'under review'.

Adequate housing is absolutely essential to a life of dignity and security. Our rigged housing system must be fixed. We need a new approach: we need a rights-based approach.

Australia is the only liberal democracy without a national human rights act or charter.

Currently, there is no federal housing act that enshrines the right to adequate housing.

Although Victoria, ACT and Queensland have their own human rights charters, these do not explicitly protect the right to adequate housing.

There is an international consensus that housing is a fundamental human right. The right to housing is cited:

- in article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948
- in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- as well as other human rights treaties ratified by almost all national governments around the world.

Australia, under the Whitlam government, signed the international covenant in 1973 and ratified it 'without reservations' in 1975. At the national level, the right to housing is recognised in Australia's national action plan on human rights.

As Australia has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, this technically means that we're bound by it, but in practice it just means that we're in 'general' agreement with it. Unlike some of the other international rights covenants, Australian jurisdictions, including Victoria, have not integrated these rights into domestic law. This is something we've been criticised for – all the way back in 2007, the United Nations special rapporteur on housing criticised the Australian government for failing to uphold or implement this right.

South Africa has the right to adequate housing in its constitution. Scotland, Canada, Finland and France are but some of the countries that have legally recognised housing as a human right. In the ACT there is an inquiry currently underway into a bill to enshrine the right to housing in ACT's human rights charter, a bill introduced by ACT Greens leader Shane Rattenbury. And former member Dr Samantha Ratnam tried twice in this place in the last two terms of Parliament to enshrine the right to housing in our charter.

Adding the right to housing to the charter would mean that future legislation and regulations, our government departments, the police and the courts would all be obligated to comply with and uphold the right to housing. It means that the affordability, accessibility and adequacy of housing would become core to government decisions around housing. The Victorian government would have to

consider how bills, policies, programs, planning decisions et cetera affect people's access to adequate housing.

Putting the right to adequate housing in the charter shows that we truly see housing as a basic human right that should be respected and upheld in Victoria.

This bill establishes the right to adequate housing. In international law, the right to adequate housing contains certain protections, entitlements and conditions. And this bill adopts the comprehensive understanding of what 'adequate' means based on guidance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Adequate housing is housing that everyone can access. Meaning that marginalised and disadvantaged groups must be accorded full and sustainable access to adequate housing resources. Adequate housing is housing that is affordable. Genuinely affordable. It is structurally sound and fit for habitation. It is safe and protects a person from harassment and other threats to their safety. It provides sufficient space for the person, without overcrowding and without a lack of privacy. It is free from discrimination. It is well located, within reasonable range of employment opportunities, healthcare services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities for those that need such access. It is secure, with long-term tenure and no risk of unfair eviction. And it is culturally adequate.

The principle of culturally adequate housing is particularly important for First Nations communities. All housing across Australia is located on land taken from First Peoples at colonisation, in a massive and systemic breach of their human rights. That violent act of dispossession is the foundation upon which our current market-based system of private land ownership was then established. The injustices of colonisation and dispossession of land continue to impact our First Nations peoples today, while the benefits of that dispossession continue to accrue for many mostly non-Indigenous Australians.

Culturally adequate housing means recognising that housing may need to be multigenerational in certain communities. Social housing policies may need to facilitate access to housing that allows for various traditional kinship care obligations. The way housing is constructed, where it is constructed, the building materials we use and our broader housing policies must appropriately enable the expression of cultural identity and diversity of housing.

This comprehensive definition of what 'adequate housing' means recognises that our right to housing is more than just a right to four walls and a roof. It is a right to a truly livable home.

This bill, enshrining a right to housing in the charter, is something members of Parliament across the political spectrum should be able to agree on.

It's time to fundamentally change the way we think about housing. Housing is a fundamental human right, not an investment. It's time our government enshrines housing as a human right. Because everyone should have a safe and secure place to call home.

I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:07): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Planning scheme amendments

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:07): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Allan Labor government published in the *Victoria Government Gazette* that the Minister for Planning had approved the following planning scheme amendments:

- (a) amendment GC252 to the Bayside, Boroondara, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Maroondah, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington and Whittlesea planning schemes on Friday 11 April 2025 and tabled on Tuesday 13 May 2025;
- (b) amendment VC267 to the Victoria Planning Provisions on Thursday 6 March 2025 and tabled on Tuesday 18 March 2025;
- (2) further notes that the time-limited Select Committee on Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274 tabled their report on Tuesday, 13 May 2025 and sought a series of documents from the government which have not been provided, including:
 - (a) the materials relied upon or provided to the Minister for Planning in making planning scheme amendments VC267, VC257, VC274 and GC252;
 - (b) documents supporting the declaration of the 50 activity centres plus 10 large pilot activity centres, making a total of 60 centres declared by the Minister for Planning;
 - (c) a list of local council representatives who attended consultation with industry stakeholders and the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) in the seven workshops held by the technical reference group;
 - (d) the ‘extensive housing target modelling’ for municipalities;
 - (e) documents linked with the Minister for Planning’s involvement, or not, in community engagement activities including the community reference groups which DTP led and which the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) was involved;
 - (f) membership of committees formed to provide government advice in relation to development contribution schemes;
 - (g) modelling on housing affordability;
 - (h) whether the Minister for Planning chose the chairs and members of the community reference groups for the announced activity centres;
 - (i) modelling by the VPA;
- (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:
 - (a) briefings and documents presented to or relied on by the Minister for Planning in the approval of planning scheme amendments GC252 and VC267; and
 - (b) all documents identified in the select committee’s transcripts from public hearings and listed in paragraph (2).

Notice of motion 968 in my name is a short-form documents motion. It notes the Andrews Labor government published in the *Victoria Government Gazette* that the Minister for Planning had approved a number of planning schemes, particularly GC252 and VC267, and these planning provisions were gazetted and then tabled. It further notes that the time-limited select committee on Victoria planning provisions, of which I and a number and others who are sitting in the chamber at the moment were members, was –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: No, no, I am not criticising it. I am just noting it was time limited; it is a statement of fact.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: Yes, there were very good reasons for that, but it does not change the facts. It was time limited because there was an actual deadline.

Ryan Batchelor: What was the deadline?

David DAVIS: The deadline was the opportunity to disallow, and that is in the legislative framework, in the Planning and Environment Act 1987, section 38, if you want to go and read it.

The second point here directly points to planning scheme amendments VC257, VC267 VC274 and GC252 and seeks the materials relied upon or provided to the Minister for Planning in making those

planning scheme amendments. We know from the inquiry that in fact material is presented to the minister and the minister does make a decision. Despite a motion of this chamber already and a request at the select committee, the minister has not released the material upon which she relied. The community is entitled to see that. We seek further documents supporting the declaration of the 50 activity centres and the 10 large pilot activity centres – a total of 60 centres declared by the Minister for Planning. She must have chosen them somehow. On what basis? Let us see if the minister made a decision. If there is a document or documents provided to her by the department on which she has based these decisions, let us see them. A list of local council representatives who attended consultation with the industry stakeholders and the Department of Transport and Planning in the seven workshops held by the technical reference group – let us know who these representatives were. The extensive housing target –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: No, we would like to know who they were, and we might even talk to them. That is a very good point. The extensive housing target modelling for municipalities – we know that dwelling targets have been set.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: President, I am confronted by a barrage here.

The PRESIDENT: Please, Mr Davis without any interjections.

David DAVIS: Housing targets have been set by the government for municipalities. They have been imposed on these municipalities, but where is the modelling for those targets? How did the government arrive at these amazing targets? They are very large. In the case of Boroondara or Stonnington in my area, they are about 90 per cent of the current dwelling numbers in the municipality. They are huge. How were they arrived at? Let us see the modelling.

Documents linked with the Minister for Planning's involvement or not in community engagement activities, including community reference groups which the Department of Transport and Planning led and in which the Victorian Planning Authority was involved. Membership of committees formed by government to provide government advice in relation to development contributions against modelling on housing affordability has been referred to by the VPA. Others who have met with the VPA have had discussions with the VPA about these. These are very sensible requests. Did the Minister for Planning choose the chairs and members of community reference groups for the announced activity groups? The modelling of these changes by the VPA, including the heritage material that they have looked at – and we understand they have modelled a 50 per cent loss of heritage sites – is actually one of the points that we would seek to see.

These are, as I say, very sensible requests. These are documents we know exist from transcripts, and they should be provided. They were requested by the committee, and they were not provided to the committee. I cannot understand why the government cannot have done this. This is all easily obtainable material. The modelling by the VPA was admitted to by the VPA in the hearing. We know people who have met with the VPA and discussed the modelling in detail, so why can't the Victorian community see that modelling? What is secret about that modelling?

This motion at paragraph (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 the briefings and documents presented to or relied upon by the Minister for Planning in the approval of the planning schemes GC252 and VC267, and all documents identified in the select committee's transcripts from public hearings and listed in paragraph (2). These are very simple requests. We asked for this material at the select committee. The select committee was not provided with this material, so we are seeking this material through the house's procedures.

In addition to that, GC252 and VC267 – those planning scheme amendments – the community are entitled to know the basis on which the Minister for Planning made the decision. She must have had documents in front of her – *(Time expired)*

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:14): I am always pleased to contribute to a debate on planning and Mr Davis's request for documents with respect to the planning scheme amendments that were the subject of a select committee process which reported not more than a month ago. Included in the recommendations of the select committee was a request for certain material. The government has, under the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, six months to respond, so I am not sure what the premature moving of this motion is given that some of these matters were in fact dealt with by the committee, considered by the committee that Mr Davis initiated and now criticises for not having enough time. Mr Davis was involved in moving the select committee's establishment and now criticises it for not having enough time. I think that is the height of hypocrisy, which I think speaks volumes about the fact that the Liberal Party in this state do not care about whether Victorians have enough housing. All they care about is blocking things and playing political games – that is all they care about. What is more worrying is that the Liberal Party is opposed to building more homes and opposed to letting Victorians have access to homes in the communities that they love, homes in the communities that they grew up in, homes in the communities that are close to their families – that is a concern.

Not only are we concerned about the way that Mr Davis seemingly ignores and criticises the very processes that he set up and the blatant hypocrisy that comes from that kind of conduct, but more worrying was the tenor of what he was saying in his contribution and the chilling effect that he is seeking to have on representatives of local government who participate in consultation processes by asking that they all be named in the Parliament. I would like to know what Mr Davis intends to do with the personal information of the people who participate in government processes, because this government is actively engaging with the Victorian community on our planning changes. If he had listened to the evidence that was given to the parliamentary inquiry, he would know that local governments, for example, affected by the activity centre proposals have been consulted with from the start, engaged with from the start. Every single local government area in this state was invited to participate in consultations on the new townhouse code, but he seems to ignore those relevant facts and instead is pursuing an agenda that is seeking to identify and shame those officials in local government who are legitimately engaged in a process of consultation, doing their jobs to try and generate more housing in this state and better planning. I think that is a disgraceful approach that the opposition, the Liberal Party, are taking, trying to silence the engagement of people with the extensive consultation processes that are underway about the activity centres here in Victoria.

If the Liberal Party is so opposed to more homes, if the Liberal Party is so opposed to making sure that Victorians have housing where they need it, where they want it and in communities they love, then they should just be open and honest and say it – just come out and say that they do not want to give Victorians access to more housing, that they reject the ability of young Victorians to buy a new home. They should be open and honest instead of perpetuating activities such as this one today. Obviously the government does not oppose the documents motion. In fact there are recommendations along those lines in the parliamentary committee report.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:19): I will only make a brief contribution to this motion, but I thank Mr Davis for bringing it before the Parliament. We will be supporting this documents motion. I was part of the select committee and was one of the members who did ask for some of this information from different government representatives and department representatives and was not satisfied with the responses that we received to those questions. These are really significant planning reforms that the government is undertaking, and we know that there is a lot more to come. This is a complete transformation of our planning system, and regardless of what you think of that, I think it is absolutely critical that the Parliament and more broadly the public have the opportunity to scrutinise these major changes to our planning system, to understand the basis for them

and to be provided with proper rationales for the arguments that are being made about how these changes will improve housing affordability, how they will deliver more housing where people need it and how they will reduce housing affordability pressures either on people who are seeking to buy their first home or on renters. None of that information has been presented.

We have been given some very high level academic papers and reviews about how, in theory, changes to the planning system may lead to an increase in supply. Even some of those that were provided by the department outlined contested ideas about whether that is even the case. There was a very interesting paper from the New South Wales parliamentary research service that did a very thorough examination of the evidence supporting the claims that are made around planning and housing supply and identified that particularly in the Australian context it is not clear that some of the changes that the government are making that they say will increase supply and affordability will have that effect locally.

So again, I think the government are entitled to have their planning program that they are pushing ahead with, but equally the Victorian public are entitled to understand the basis for that, to understand why the government has gone ahead with this and to understand what options they considered, who they consulted with and what expert advice they relied upon. I think it is a very basic request to have some of this information provided, and it is tiresome that we, week after week, are asking for this sort of information to be provided about major decisions. This is going to completely transform the city that we live in, for better or worse, and we deserve to understand the basis for the decisions that the government has made here.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:22): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion 968, and I just simply concur with everything Dr Mansfield said. It is exactly right. It is too big a project with too broad an impact not to be clear on what the mechanisms were, what the motivations are, what the intentions are, who was consulted, what interests were at the table when they were consulted and how we came to these conclusions, because there is a lot we do not know. And I will tell you, the little that we do know is that the councils were not consulted. They were given selectively short periods of time before caretaker periods to respond. The scale of the changes proposed to them was such that they had a week to respond before caretaker and could not possibly marshal a considered response, and you could only view that as a calculated exercise in limiting communities' voices on this matter.

The City of Whitehorse, for example, a city of currently 72,000 residences, which had already planned for 40,000 new residences within its boundaries, within the same footprint, was given a top-down mandate that it must deliver 74,000 additional residences within the same footprint. They were not consulted on this. The modelling that supported that that was possible, economically feasible, would deliver affordable housing – none of that was ever discussed. So it basically exists on someone's spreadsheet where a top-down planning exercise has taken place. No-one in the community was consulted; none of the community stakeholder groups were consulted. None of the considerations of other additional social infrastructure that would need to be provided seem to have been considered.

Michael Galea interjected.

Richard WELCH: Well, look, if it did take place, then provide it, because I think the government has conditioned itself to think that any idea of transparency or scrutiny on what its work is is somehow a witch-hunt. Victorians want to know how you came up with these ideas, because they were not consulted on them, the stakeholders were not consulted on them and the local governments were not consulted on them. They came top-down. They came top down with lots of diagrams. Clearly someone had been working on these for some time.

I will take up one point that Mr Batchelor raised: 'What's the rush? The committee has got six months to report and provide information.' Well, what we learned in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is that the consultations will start before that information comes along. So yet again we are going to have a situation where the community is being given a so-called consultation period without

full knowledge of what they are being consulted on. When it comes to the Blackburn activity centre and they are asked to give their feedback, will this information be available to them as they provide that feedback, or will they be providing feedback on partial information that will be then taken and used and then subsequently further information will come out?

All we are asking for here really is basic transparency and sensible information on what is a massive change. We are not talking about a playground in one community here, we are talking about 60 communities radically changed in character. I commend the motion. The communities deserve the information, and we should have it.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:26): I also rise to speak on this motion today. I do note that my time is somewhat limited, as seems to be appropriate, because subsection (2) of this motion talks about the time-limited select committee. I am quite surprised to hear you, Mr Davis, complaining about a time-limited select committee. If only there was someone in this place who could have had some control over that. But it was in fact Mr Davis himself who insisted on a rammed-through, too-short, six-week select committee. In the same week of course that Ms Crozier was telling us in the chamber that six weeks was nowhere near a long enough time to make any decisions of significance, Mr Davis was in here saying that apparently a six-week select committee is fine – the same select committee time period he is now complaining about.

Perhaps if we did have a longer select committee, perhaps if he had listened to our suggestions that six weeks was way too short, this is work that the select committee could have been doing. But this is already part of the recommendation of the report, and it is already forming part of government process. Once again we see Mr Davis trying to cover over his own cock-ups, trying to fix things that he has already done, ignoring the fact that it was actually him that proposed a six-week select committee, not the government, and in fact then trying to fix up the errors that he has already made. So it is another case of, as Mr McIntosh might say, ‘Well, well, well’. Here we are again. This government is going to continue fighting for the housing aspirations, though, of all Victorians, wherever you live.

Motion agreed to.

Early childhood education and care

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (10:28): I move:

That this house:

- (1) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, the following documents that relate to the early childhood education and care sector created since 1 January 2022 that are in the possession, custody or control of the Minister for Education, Minister for Children, Minister for Disability, Minister for Police, Commission for Children and Young People or the Department of Education:
 - (a) all documents not currently publicly available relating to emergency action notices, prohibition notices, suspension notices, compliance notices, show cause notices, cancellation notices or other notices or directions served on or regarding early childhood education and care (ECEC) providers under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Children’s Services Act 1996;
 - (b) documents relating to internal risk assessments or regulatory response decisions;
 - (c) documents of compliance actions taken against individual services or providers, including number and type of reaches and regulatory outcomes;
 - (d) internal guidance documents or frameworks used to classify provider risk, assess compliance, or determine regulatory responses; and
- (2) requests that any information provided that identifies details of individual children and families be redacted, and that redaction of names of staff be considered where appropriate to protect privacy unless relevant to regulatory findings.

This motion calls on the government to provide the same documents provided in New South Wales relating to the early childhood and education sector. It follows on from the work of my colleague

Abigail Boyd and *Four Corners*, which exposed the structural crisis in the sector. The private childcare sector has become a money-making machine, a playground for big operators to pull profit from a system that should be all about care. Right now it is a booming industry worth over \$20 billion a year. Corporations are diving into early childhood education, not because they care about children but because they see a chance to make a quick buck. They are making money off the backs of hardworking parents and carers, for whom child care is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

The *Four Corners* investigation exposed the horrifying consequences of letting a profit motive dictate how we care for children. No child should be unsafe in a place that is meant to nurture them. Families are paying through the nose to access care. In some centres fees exceed \$1000 a week, and educators, overwhelmingly women, are overworked, underpaid and undervalued, which begs the question: who is actually benefiting? Because it is not the children, it is not the parents and it is not the educators. The winners are the private corporations, often supported by public subsidies.

In recent years multiple incidents have exposed serious failings in Australia's for-profit childcare sector. In Werribee two toddlers escaped from a childcare centre and ran onto a busy 70-kilometre-an-hour road, narrowly avoiding tragedy and prompting criminal charges against the operator for breaching safety laws. In Melbourne nine-month-old Ada was rushed to hospital after being mistakenly fed yoghurt containing allergens despite her family providing a detailed allergy action plan and the centre's written assurances. Staff failed to follow emergency procedures properly, putting her life at risk from anaphylaxis.

In states like the ACT, where there has been a stronger public investment and tighter regulation, government-run centres are delivering more consistent outcomes. The Greens believe care is not a commodity, that every child deserves access to high-quality, affordable early learning. It is time to end the two-tiered system, a system that leaves some children in safe and enriching environments while others are placed in centres marked by high staff turnover, inadequate oversight and a relentless focus on the bottom line. This is a political choice. We can continue down the path of privatisation or we can choose to invest in our youngest citizens.

With numerous reports of harm to children and repeated warnings from both staff and families, it seems the regulator in Victoria has been neglecting its duty to properly oversee the sector. With so much at risk if we do not strengthen regulation and scrutiny of childcare services, I have no option but to move this motion. This will allow us, along with the public, to thoroughly examine what has been happening within this industry, identify where the failures lie and determine the urgent reforms needed. I echo the calls of my federal colleagues to urgently establish an independent early childhood education and care commission to strictly enforce quality standards and keep our children safe. It is so important that we have a nationally consistent approach to the standards so that no matter where a child lives they are guaranteed safe, high-quality care and strong protections. I commend this motion to the house.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:32): I rise to make a contribution on this motion brought forward by Ms Gray-Barberio in relation to childcare regulation. It is a documents motion, so it is calling for a number of documents to be produced by the government, as is the wont on Wednesdays in this slot when various crossbenchers or Liberal members will call for documents to be produced in relation to a range of issues.

What this motion is calling for is the release of documents that are in the possession of the minister in relation to publicly available information on prohibition notices, suspension notices, compliance notices and the like, but also internal risk assessments, regulatory response decisions, documents of compliance actions taken against individual services or providers and internal guidance documents or frameworks to classify risks, and then it specifies that if providing any of those things causes a risk to privacy, that that also be considered in the context of that.

The government's position is that we will not be opposing this motion. The background on childcare regulation is that principally the Commonwealth government is responsible for insolvency, childcare provision and funding as well as employment law. That is Commonwealth government responsibility. The Victorian government is responsible for the provision of kindergarten for three- and four-year-olds as well as regulating the implementation of the national quality standards, or national law, for early childhood education and care through the Victorian regulatory authority – the quality assessment and regulation division, also known as QARD. I know public servants love a good acronym; I do not, but there it is as we speak – QARD. That is a new one. I do not even know if I have pronounced that right. Who would know? I am sure somebody would know if it has meaning to them but it does not to the average person, I am sure.

Whilst child care is a Commonwealth responsibility, we are getting on with delivering 50 government owned and operated early learning centres, and that is important because we recognised that when families wanted and needed to access child care, there were areas where there was absolutely none available. That impacts women's workforce participation – if they cannot find services to care for their children when they need to access work, that is something that impacts women in terms of their economic independence, financial independence and long-term financial prosperity. In childcare regulation, as I said, there is a role for the Commonwealth, but it is limited. Regulation is with each state and territory's regulators. In Victoria the safety of children is always our priority. Anyone with concerns about safety of children in early childhood should always call the regulatory authority. There is a 1300 number there, which I am not going to repeat, but it is available on the website. It is there for everybody to access, and they should access it. That is the appropriate place for any concerns about centres not complying with regulations to be raised. It is their role then to investigate that, and that is an independent agency that obviously needs to do its important work in assessing any concerns.

The budget papers show that for the most recent calendar year the Victorian regulatory authority exceeded the target number of inspections of early childhood services, achieving 4729 inspections ahead of its target of 4000. So any agency that exceeds its target for inspections – or any target for that matter – should be congratulated for those efforts. It is a difficult area to work in. Children are obviously vulnerable in any of those settings, and we need to make sure that they are protected as much as possible. This is why we have regulatory agencies that are at arms length to other things so that they can inspect any concerns that are raised and inspect them in an appropriate manner. I could speak longer on this, but the clock is against me given it is the wont now of this chamber to not allow government speakers much time to speak on documents motions. But as I said, we will not be opposing this motion.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:37): I rise to speak to motion 969 that Ms Gray-Barberio has brought to the house in relation to requesting documents from the government in relation to early childhood education and the care sector. This motion, as has been pointed out, is asking for:

all documents not currently publicly available relating to emergency action notices, prohibition notices, suspension notices, compliance notices, show cause notices, cancellation notices or other notices or directions served on or regarding early childhood education and care ... providers under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Children's Services Act 1996 ...

It goes on to request documents relating to internal risk assessments or regulatory response decisions; the number of compliance actions taken, including the number and type of breaches and the regulatory outcomes; and the internal guidance documents or frameworks used to classify provider risk. The motion also is looking at a number of different portfolio areas, obviously in relation to the education and child wellbeing parts of the legislation, but it is also speaking to the Minister for Education, Minister for Children, Minister for Disability, Minister for Police, the Commission for children and Young People and the Department of Education. So it is broad sweeping, and in some of these areas I think there has to be some sensitivity around some of those documents that are provided, given the nature of what the Greens are asking for.

I note in the contribution by Ms Gray-Barberio that there was a reference to the *Four Corners* program that was done in March around this area where it was exposing a number of childcare centres that had been in question. I understand that this is being taken up by members of the Greens in other states, who are also pushing for this issue. I just want to say in relation to that that in that story that I have read – I did not see the program – it did not say how many Victorian childcare centres or early learning centres have been affected. I do not know what those are. I know back in 2017 when I was the shadow minister there were concerns around some providers of early learning centres in some areas where there was real concern about safety and wellbeing of children – overcrowding and who was monitoring.

The minister at the time spoke to me in depth about that, and they did make some changes, I have to say, and I was very supportive of those changes at the time. In 2018, when those changes came into effect, they were cracking down on dodgy day care providers. The previous year, 2017, 22 compliance notices were provided and there were 1200 investigations into a whole range of these settings across the state. At the time, as I said, I was very supportive of these measures, because we do want children to be safe, we want parents to understand that their children are safe, that they do have an ability to have confidence in the system. I would be concerned if that is not going on now, if that oversight is not being put in place. As I said, there needs to be proper compliance. Some of these dodgy providers – what was explained to me at the time was incredibly concerning. It is not, as Ms Gray-Barberio talks about, the profit motives that she spoke about; it is often others in the system that are doing the wrong thing. You are very critical of that sector, but you are not looking at the sector as a whole. Whilst I support the motion for transparency, I would caution on some areas, and I would say that I hope the government is continuing with the work that they did in 2017–18.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:42): I also rise to share a few remarks on short-form documents motion 969 which has been put before us today by Ms Gray-Barberio. I note, as I think all speakers have, the distinct importance of this topic when it comes to childhood services, early childhood education and child protection. I see Mr Puglielli and Mr Welch in the chamber; this is a topic that we discussed just about a week ago in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee when as government members we were putting questions to the minister, some obviously on very difficult topics, and getting some important information put on the record in those hearings. I would note that as well.

I further note that, as Ms Terpstra said, there is a distinction here between the role of the state and the role of the Commonwealth, which we should be very cognisant of. In terms of this issue, we do know that the Victorian government is already working with the Australian government and other states and territories to ensure that regulators have the appropriate powers, that they have the appropriate penalties and that they have the appropriate resources to effectively and transparently regulate this sector. It involves looking at the adequacy of that national law and those regulations, which is why it is so important that those things are in place and it is why it is so important that a national approach is taken to this important issue.

The government has also, I believe, fully accepted and welcomed the Albanese federal Labor government's proposal to apply stricter controls over the frankly billions of dollars it spends each year in childcare subsidy funding to preference those high-quality providers and to remove funding from those that do not act in the best interests of children. It is such an important thing to be doing, and I do note, for the benefit of the chamber, that that work is already happening, as it should, because we all want our children to have the best start in life. That is why it is called Best Start, Best Life, and there are many things that go into delivering that, whether it is the early childcare centres that we are developing; the parenting centres, including one in my electorate in Clyde North; or whether it is making three- and four-year-old kinder free for all Victorian families and the progressive rollout of that. That is all part of the same objective, but it is also critical that we do get that regulation correct.

We know as well that Minister Blandthorn was very up-front with the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week. In addition to providing some valuable information to the committee in terms

of casework allocation rates and the like, she detailed some of the incredible staff of the department who are doing some of the most difficult work in this space responding to child sexual exploitation and the support we have provided for that team – a team set out under this government to do that work specifically. That work continues, which the minister spoke to us about in detail, but she was also clear to the committee that there is more work to be done. As she outlined, we are keen to continue that conversation and to continue that meaningful work with the federal government, because it is an issue that requires that multilevel approach and that multilevel attention from two levels of government.

We know that this government has been working with the Commonwealth and with other states and territories to strengthen child safety, with stronger child safety measures announced just this week I believe by all states and territories to strengthen safety in the early childhood education settings. The Minister for Children has also sought further discussions on additional improvements to the adequacy of those national laws and regulations, to be a conversation at the next education ministers meeting as part of the national cabinet. Whilst we know that there are ample resources already in place for the Victorian regulator, I would also note for the house that the government has supported the Productivity Commission's recommendation that the Australian government should reinstate funding for these regulatory authorities, noting that that was ceased in 2018 under the former coalition federal government, and also supports that recommendation to implement a regulatory resourcing standard that enables regulators to keep pace with growth and changes in this sector. In line with convention, we will not be opposing this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Drought

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (10:47): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) Victoria is currently under the worst drought conditions in decades according to the Victorian Farmers Federation, with some areas having their lowest rainfall totals on record;
- (2) farmers are bearing the brunt with:
 - (a) high feed and water costs;
 - (b) high fuel and energy costs;
 - (c) high freight costs;
 - (d) ever-increasing costs of day-to-day life;
- (3) farmers are concerned with the proposed increases to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund levy for the 2026–27 financial year and beyond;
- (4) agricultural production in Victoria in 2021–22 was valued at \$20.2 billion and employed over 153,000 Victorians;
- (5) the announcement of the expansion of the Allan Labor government's drought support package on 30 May 2025 is commendable but more needs to be done;
- (6) in October 2019, the then Andrews Labor government announced the farmers drought fund, providing payments of up to \$3000 to farming families;
- (7) farmers and councils have been pleading for this kind of targeted help to ease the strain of the ongoing drought;

and calls on the Allan Labor government to implement hardship funding for farming households to help with the pressures of the ongoing drought.

Today I rise to seek support for my motion, which quite frankly should not need convincing. This is not a partisan issue. It is not about politics; it is about people, about families, about the backbone of our state – our farmers, who are staring down one of the worst droughts in living memory. According to the Victorian Farmers Federation, Victoria is currently enduring the worst drought conditions in decades. Some areas have had their lowest rainfall totals on record – not in five years, not in 10, on

record. That is how bad things are. And who is carrying the weight of this crisis? It is our farmers, the men and women who put food on our tables, who fuel our economy, who keep regional communities alive. They are battling not only a lack of rain but the crushing burden of high feed and water costs, skyrocketing fuel and energy bills, unaffordable freight costs and the proposed increase to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund levy in the 2026–27 financial year. On top of that, they are struggling with the same rising cost of living that every Victorian faces. It is relentless, it is unsustainable and it is unacceptable that more has not been done by this government to provide real targeted relief.

Let us be clear: Victorian agriculture is not a niche sector. In 2021–22 it was valued at \$20.2 billion. It directly employed over 153,000 Victorians. These are real jobs, real livelihoods, not just in the bush but in our regional towns, our supply chains and our export markets. When farming suffers, Victoria suffers. Now, I do acknowledge that on 30 May the Allan Labor government expanded its drought support package. That is commendable, but let us be honest, there is more to be done. Our farmers have been pleading for help for months. Councils have been calling for targeted support and they are right to do so because they remember what real help looks like, such as the \$3000 payments made to farming families back in 2019 under the farmers drought fund. What I am calling for in this motion is not radical. It is not excessive, it is reasonable, it is needed and it is overdue. This house must send a clear message to our farmers, to regional Victorians, to every person working in agriculture, that we see them, we hear them and we will back them. I urge all of my colleagues to support this motion. Let us come together, not as political opponents, but as representatives of the people, and call on the Allan Labor government to implement genuine hardship funding for farming households now, because if we fail to act, we are failing the very people who feed us.

I would like to share with you now my own personal experience with surviving the drought. In 2018 and 2019 my husband I were trying to get our own dairy farm up and running. New to owning a farm and this part of Victoria, we were faced with the harsh reality of just how fast and severe a drought can strike in northern Victoria. My husband is a fifth-generation dairy farmer who has lived and worked through droughts before, but this was something new and devastating. The effects on my family were deep and lasting, from the stress taking a physical toll on both me and my husband, to the mental stress and anguish, damage to my marriage and the toll it took on my children, which is often overlooked. I had friends checking in on us daily for two years out of fear that they would find something tragic had happened to us. My children hid birthday invitations and they hid camp notices so as to not add to the burden that my husband and I faced. Six years on from that drought, the fractures in my family still remain. Drought leaves a lasting mark on not only the land but also the people who live and work that land.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:51): I want to start by thanking Mrs Tyrrell for bringing this motion forward. I heartily support her sentiment expressed about not politicising this; let us understand the dynamics and support our farming communities and farming regions.

I would also like to say that I have seen firsthand the extraordinary stress that drought conditions have placed on our farmers and our farming communities. We have spoken in this chamber before about the pressures on farming communities, but I will just give you some additional examples. This motion provides an opportunity for me to do that.

Where the purchase of stockfeed is usually done on an account paid over time, after a month or three months or so, stockfeed suppliers are now demanding cash payments. Farmers are now approaching their banks to actually get extensions on their overdrafts or indeed extensions on their mortgages to pay for stockfeed. As we know, stockfeed is an operational cost, not a capital cost. Increasing credit risks mean that many farmers are having to pay on the spot to secure feed, and this means negotiating with their banks, which is also an extremely stressful thing to do given the circumstances. It is a stressful experience at the best of times, but when the outcome is so important and so critical it is doubly so. Farmers are struggling to source and pay for feed while watching the condition of their stock deteriorate. Sheep farmers are watching ewes abandon newborn lambs, cattle farmers are

weaning calves before their time to save the mothers, and many are making the heartbreaking decision to destock, which represents decades of careful breeding basically lost.

These impacts have a ripple effect on the rest of our communities. I would point you all to a really good article in today's *Standard* – I have not checked to see if it is in the paper version, but it is in the online version – written by Jessica Greenan, and it takes the town of Cobden as an example. All of the businesses have spoken about their experiences in recent months and years, and it is a beautiful microcosm, a very sad microcosm of how struggling farming communities play out across the entire economy. If you imagine what is happening in Cobden and times that by much of regional Victoria and certainly in the south-west of Victoria, you really do get a very clear and very distressing picture.

Suppliers have told me of their fears for the wellbeing of customers that they have worked with for years and about how their staff are coping with the constant conversations about prices, credit limits and the desperate need for feed and water. Charities have reported increased demand for their services. More farms, farm labourers and small business owners are seeking help for immediate personal needs. One south-west charity has set up a service to discreetly deliver food to farms because farming families are embarrassed to be seen seeking help. One service is busy putting together hampers for women in their community with items such as pads and tampons, shampoo and other toiletries, because women simply cannot afford these simple items anymore.

A timely autumn break would have allowed pasture growth to recover prior to soil cooling in the winter months. Unfortunately this did not eventuate. We are finally seeing some rain across south-west Victoria and western Victoria – last weekend Warrnambool had over 50 millimetres and it has had another 18 millimetres in the last 24 hours. However, while the rain is very welcome, we are now past the point where that rain can make a difference to pasture growth, so the benefit of that rain really is to soak the soil, and we are hoping that will continue, because if it gets down into the roots of trees, then once spring comes and the soil warms up you will have already wet soil ready for growth. Pastures are really not going to regenerate for six months, and it will take even longer for feed markets to recover because no-one will have spare to sell.

That is why the government has acted by expanding our drought support package to meet the real and immediate needs on the ground. I want to highlight one particular aspect of the drought package announced on 30 May which demonstrates the tailored and adaptive approach that we are taking. Recognising that farmers in the south-west are suffering the worst drought on record, the package includes specific additional supports such as \$10,000 for farm drought infrastructure grants, with revised eligibility that includes water carting and pasture re-establishment for both crop and livestock farmers; a south-west drought coordinator; a south-west small business financial counsellor; additional capacity for the Rural Financial Counselling Service in the south-west; one-to-one mental health and wellbeing support; and the Victorian drought freight network, which will allow road trains up to 84 tonnes to transport critical grain and fodder to Victorian farms in need in the south-west. The drought package has been welcomed by many farmers and councils who have been calling for support that addresses not just immediate needs but also builds that resilience into the future.

The motion also refers to the farmers drought fund announced in 2019. That program offered direct payments and served an important purpose during a different period of dry conditions. However, today's model reflects lessons learnt then. Rather than focusing solely on one-off payments, we are now working with a broader strategy that includes financial, technical, mental health and infrastructure assistance.

Whilst the drought is widespread, the particular circumstances of each enterprise vary. Each farm has a different mortgage level. Each farm will have different stock conditions and different feed reserves. The status of their in-ground pasture will vary, as will the type of farming. Then you have got localised weather conditions – whether your farm is in a valley or up on a hill or facing the northern slope or the southern slope. All of these create unique individual, different circumstances, and that is why this adaptive package that the Allan Labor government has put together is in place, so that each enterprise

can apply for and seek help in the unique way that matches their circumstances. That is why our drought package is more adaptable and sustainable, because the challenges we face are more complex. Droughts are becoming more frequent, more intense and more unpredictable due to climate change, and that means our response must also evolve. The adaptive model we have taken allows farmers to tailor the assistance that they seek. It is also worth noting that the Victorian government continues to advocate strongly to the Commonwealth government for national consistency in drought relief and long-term climate adaptation funding. This would be a really valuable contribution if the federal government did move in that space.

Whilst states have a key role to play in delivering support on the ground, a shared funding responsibility would ensure that communities can rely on robust safety nets no matter where they are in the country. As Mrs Tyrrell has said in her motion, Victoria's agriculture sector contributes a significant portion to our economy. I would definitely say that the south-west of Victoria exists because of farming and profits because of farming, and that is why we are all there.

I want to thank the farming families, community leaders and local governments in western Victoria and across the state who have taken the time to share their experiences and their stories to help us put the package together that we have, and we are continuing to listen. I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her motion.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:02): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for bringing this motion forward, but I also thank Mrs Tyrrell for coming to the farmers rally at Bookaar, where we benefited, as best we could, those farming families with a day of barbecue and conviviality. So thank you, Mrs Tyrrell. Mr Bourman came as well, as did the Leader of the Nationals Mr O'Brien – a very good turnout. But I did notice that not one person from the opposite side was there, even Ms Ermacora. You were down the road at Mount Noorat at some sort of truth-telling march or something. You could have just dropped in to the Bookaar rally to support all the farmers. In Ballarat on Sunday, there was not one Labor member. Minister Tierney, you could have turned up, Ms Settle – everybody could have turned up. You have never turned up at one meeting of farmers or firefighters on this issue, so do not pontificate over there about your concern, because you will not actually front the people that are really concerned.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mrs McArthur, I ask you to talk through the Chair, please.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, could you please ask your colleagues to refrain from interjecting as well, and I will keep going.

But, Mrs Tyrrell, thank you for coming. Mrs Tyrrell was at Bookaar, and she would have heard this amazing poem that was recited by a farmer and a firefighter of 40 years, Mr Patterson. It brought people to tears, and it was again recited in Ballarat. I am going to read it out here because I think it is very important. It is called *Rain from Nowhere* by Murray Hartin:

His cattle didn't get a bid, they were fairly bloody poor,
What was he going to do? He couldn't feed them anymore,
The dams were all but dry, hay was thirteen bucks a bale,
And last month's talk of rain was just a fairytale,
His credit had run out, no chance to pay what's owed,
Bad thoughts ran through his head as he drove down Gully Road.

"Geez, great grandad bought the place back in 1898,
"Now I'm such a useless bastard, I'll have to shut the gate.
"I can't feed my wife and kids, not like dad and those before,
"Crikeys, Grandma kept it going while Pop fought in the war."
With depression now his master, he abandoned what was right,
There's no place in life for failures, he'd end it all tonight.

There were still some things to do, he'd have to shoot the cattle first,

Of all the jobs he'd ever done, that would be the worst.

Then he'd shower, watch the news, they'd all sit down for tea,

Read his kids a bedtime story and watch some more TV,

Kiss his wife goodnight, say he was off to shoot some 'roos

Then in a paddock far away he'd blow away the blues.

But he drove in the gate and stopped – as he always had

To check the roadside mailbox – and found a letter from his Dad.

Now his dad was not a writer, Mum did all the cards and mail

But he knew the writing from the notebooks that he'd kept from cattle sales.

He sensed the nature of its contents, felt the moisture in his eyes,

Just the fact his dad had written was enough to make him cry.

"Son, I know it's bloody tough, it's a cruel and twisted game,

"This life upon the land when you're screaming out for rain,

"There's no candle in the darkness, not a single speck of light

"But don't let the demon get you, you have to do what's right,

"I don't know what's in your head but push the nasty thoughts away

"See, you'll always have your family at the back end of the day

"You have to talk to someone and, yeah mate, I know I rarely did

"But you have to think about Fiona and think about the kids.

"I'm worried about you son, you haven't phoned for quite a while,

"And I know the road you're on 'cause I've walked every bloody mile.

"The date? December 7 back in 1983,

"Behind the shed I had the shotgun rested by the brigalow tree.

"See, I'd borrowed way too much to buy the Johnson place

"Then it didn't rain for years and we got bombed by interest rates,

"The bank was at the door, I didn't think I had a choice,

"I began to squeeze the trigger – that's when I heard your voice.

"You said 'Where are you Daddy? It's time to play our game'

"I've got Squatter all set up, we might get General Rain.'

"It really was that close and you're the one that stopped me son,

"And you're the one that taught me there's no answer in a gun.

"Just remember people love you, good mates won't let you down.

"Look, you might have to swallow pride and take that job in town,

"Just 'til things come good, son, you've always got a choice

"And when you get this letter ring me, 'cause I'd love to hear your voice."

Well he cried and laughed and shook his head then put the truck in gear,

Shut his eyes and hugged his dad in a vision that was clear,

Dropped the cattle at the yards, put the truck away

Filled the troughs the best he could and fed his last ten bales of hay.

Then he strode towards the homestead, shoulders back, head held high,

He still knew the road was tough but there was purpose in his eye.

He called his wife and children, who'd lived through all his pain,

Hugs said more than words – he'd come back to them again,

They talked of silver linings, how good times always follow bad,

Then he walked towards the phone, picked it up and rang his Dad.

And while the kids set up the Squatter, he hugged his wife again,

Then they heard the roll of thunder and they smelt the smell of rain.

So we are in a terrible situation in western Victoria and across many other parts of Victoria. This drought is probably the worst since 1900 – the federation drought – and more can be done by government and local government too. I just want to refer you to some people who are doing it really tough and who have called out government and bureaucracy for being totally uncaring and hopeless in this situation. One was a post by Posie Mann. She was trying to feed her stock on the roadside. She has no food in her paddocks. Basically, hay is now so expensive that it is almost impossible to buy or find. She refers to:

... some pathetic individual who obviously has nothing better to do to the Moyne Shire Council for grazing the road side! I know of other farmers locally who have been threatened with fines for doing the same thing!

She was reported for ultimately reducing roadside fuel, reported for allowing her starving cattle access to the thousands of kilos of feed growing on our roadsides, with no other purpose than to regenerate and die back on a yearly basis. She was reported for allowing her cattle to supposedly roam free whenever they wanted, even though they were manned by people and dogs with legal roadside signs at each end. The shire's reply projected with justification:

roadside grazing –

listen to this –

put's motorbike riders and cyclists at high risk of hitting a cow pat and it spraying ... over them which could cause an accident ...

I mean, I ask you. And anyway, Posie says:

NEVER have I seen a bloody cyclist down my road which is a sleepy single width back road majoritively used by locals!

Maybe we should be plucking every bird out of the sky incase one shits on a cyclists and put's them off balance ...

These are the sorts of nonsensical things that are seriously affecting farmers. Let them graze the roadsides. You will be doing us all a favour. And your grants are a complete farce. Nobody has got a spare \$10,000 or \$5000 to actually match them, and what will they buy in any case? So well done, Mrs Tyrrell, for the motion.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (11:12): I rise to speak in support of Mrs Tyrrell's motion. I could go through everything that is in here, but I am sure it has been gone through already. Farming communities and rural and regional communities have been suffering on a greater scale as time has gone on as we have the urbanisation of society. What that means is there is less attention being paid to the regions, and from successive governments you just see that happening. There are times when there is an attempt made to deal with it, and whether it is any good or not is for history to decide. But what I reckon has really come in at this stage is the drought. I remember the drought of the early 1980s. Ironically, I lived outside of Stuart Mill in central Victoria at the time, and even though it snowed one year, the rest of the time it was pretty dry, and then we saw over the years it did not rain, and eventually we had Ash Wednesday and things like that. And the poem Mrs McArthur recited, I heard that read out at a rally against the tax earlier. I think of the people I knew at the time, and I wonder how many of them felt that way. I will put it on record I remember one of my first dealings with someone that suicided was a friend from one of the neighbouring farms. I do not know what was going through her mind at the time she decided to do that. From a mid-age teenager – what do you want to call it; a teenager in the mid teens – it did not seem to make sense, but with the benefit of the years that go on you can see how things can get overwhelming for people. We have high feed and water costs, high energy costs, high fuel costs. I have brought up in this place a number of times that even just collecting firewood is now becoming a drama. You have got certain places, certain times, and if you do not own a four-wheel drive, a lot of it is just down to pure luck, about making your way down there.

I am hardly a libertarian, but the government should be staying out of people's lives unless they need assistance. I am not talking about handouts. Handouts are good, but that does not fix the problem. The

wild cost of hay and things like that – the government can help with that, whether it is through transporting, and there is the need for feed and hay runners and things like that. They could all benefit from government help. That is where I think governments can step in and do some good, as well as giving cash grants as needed. But energy relief – we saw recently, I think it was last week, that there are going to be increases in electricity prices. As we are getting pushed further and further towards being electrified, the prices are going up. For us in this chamber that is not going to be a great hardship, but there are a lot of people that live week to week, and a lot of people are living less than week to week. In the rural areas you can be asset rich – you can have millions of dollars in assets – but your income, what you can spend on your house, is sometimes quite little. You have got hundreds of thousands of dollars in machinery, but if you have a bad year, that machinery might not bring in enough to cover the costs of running it. That gets absorbed on the premise that there will one day be a bumper year, but the droughts go on. We have boom and bust. We have droughts and flooding rains – I cannot remember the term, but there is a poem about that. This is a harsh country, and it is very unforgiving.

There are people out there in the rural and regional areas fighting it every day, fighting to feed us and fighting to keep the cities, the suburbs and that, fed and going. I feel this is a good time for the government – we have got people in drought now – before there are massive problems on a wider scale; I mean, South Australia I believe has just appointed a drought commissioner; to look at giving people assistance before they get to the point of being almost destitute. That is when I say government should be helping people. There are people out there that maybe need more rebates on their energy costs or maybe they just need to be able to go and get more wood to fuel their wood fires. I think holistically this needs to be looked at, and I commend Mrs Tyrrell for bringing this to our house. I think we speak on this a little bit, but I do not think we can speak on it enough, because even if it starts raining in a nice way and we get a bumper crop this year, which is yet to be seen, there will always be the fight. And they are the people out there fighting for themselves and also fighting for the whole of Victoria.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:26): As Ms Ermacora noted, the government will not be opposing this motion. I would like to thank Mrs Tyrrell for bringing it to this place and for sharing her story. Farming is one of the most difficult games to be in, particularly if we are talking about farmers in a small business, farmers with smaller acreage or medium-sized acreage and farmers that – as to some of the comments Mr Bourman was just making – do not have the cash to back up the assets when times are tough and when times like these hit. This drought has, through its prolonged nature, become worse and worse for farmers hit.

Mrs Tyrrell talked about the \$20.2 billion the agricultural sector is worth to Victoria. That is product that we are consuming here in Victoria. It is product, I might add high-quality product, premium product, that we are exporting to the world. The agriculture sector is not a nice to have, it is a must have. We must have agricultural produce for ourselves but also to feed other parts of the world who are looking to purchase our product. Obviously with a growing global population, it is a big conversation about how we feed the world. We have seen with global wars like in Ukraine, the breadbasket of Europe, the impacts that has on Africa and other nations. But it is incredibly important for us that farmers are supported and able to produce for Victorians.

The drought has been absolutely horrific in the west of the state, in Ms Ermacora's region and Mrs McArthur's region. It has also touched eastern Victoria, particularly severely in Benambra and Omeo up in the top north-east, and also impacted on southern Gippsland. So I really want to start by acknowledging farmers who are finding themselves through this drought in a horrible, horrible situation. Mrs Tyrrell shared some of her stories from being impacted in drought. Those stories are going on in families, particularly small farming families. We are not talking corporate farms with thousands of acres and deep pockets, perhaps owned by large companies. We are talking family farms.

The corporatisation of farming has been occurring over decades. It happened with my farm. My parents bought into 400 acres, hit the 1983 drought and basically got smashed and then had to wipe

out half of the farm. With that drought, I will note, the rains came at the end of April; now we are talking about rains coming in June. This is a significantly worse drought, as Mrs Tyrrell talked about in her contribution. The thing that we all need to come together on and acknowledge is that these weather conditions are getting worse and worse. We are talking about bringing feed in, but it gets pretty hard when South Australia is smashed with drought and New South Wales is smashed with flood. We could be talking about any sort of product, but we are talking about feed. When the conditions are not right for feed, even with the extended network of resource sharing that have here in Australia, and are fortunate to have, that leaves us in a precarious position. When there simply is not the feed, we are all pretty attuned to the fact that the prices are going to go up. The cost to people who are already doing it tough is getting worse and worse.

We need to come together and acknowledge some long-term problems and challenges and find some long-term solutions, otherwise what we are going to see is small family farmers, as I said, with limited cash flow and without those deep pockets, as Mr Bourman said, having to finance machinery. The other way you can look at it is when you have to finance crops like horticulture. In eastern Victoria we have veggie farmers. We do not hear too much about veggie farmers, but they can get smashed and lose an entire crop – you can see them disappear overnight.

We are talking about people going into small business. We have heard about the passion that exists within farmers, about the love for what they do – it is not a job, it is a vocation – and it is generational. It is passed down through those families over generations, and that brings an added burden of responsibility, an added burden of guilt. When we are talking about mental health I do not think we can ignore all those other factors. If someone has a business in metropolitan Melbourne and they have had it for five to 10 years, there will be a lot of mental anguish if that business does not succeed, but is there that generational layer of feeling of failure for not being able to do what generations did before? To meet farmers where they are at, we have got to acknowledge the increased challenges.

We have talked about the economic challenges at the moment – the war in Ukraine, inflation and fuel prices – every time a farmer has had to stick diesel in a trailer for the last few years and every time they have had to buy equipment, everything has significantly risen in price. Are they seeing those returns on the other side of the farm gate? Probably not. They have had to take that on board with their operating costs. They have still got to look after their family, they have still got to feed them, they have still got to educate them, and they have still got to do all these things, which is why I am really proud to be part of a Labor government that invests in our regions and rural areas with education, with child care, with public transport infrastructure, with health infrastructure. Something I have spoken a lot of times about in this place and I am passionate about, is about putting in that support network and the layers of things that regional and rural communities need to exist. We cannot rip those services out like happened in decades gone.

Once the services are there, it is important that these small businesses – again, not the corporate farms; they are big enough and ugly enough to look after themselves – are set up for success. If we can all come together and acknowledge these challenges and the challenges that our weather systems are giving us, making things harder and making it harder to do what previous generations did, then I think it will be easier for our current farmers to accept where they find themselves at and then make decisions, whether they be investment decisions or decisions about working off the farm. My dad was a shearer, he worked in factories and he worked driving a taxi until he got hit by a truck at 4 o'clock in the morning because he was working around the clock.

These are decisions that have to be made by farmers, that have to be made by families and that have to be made by communities about how we ensure that people are going to live happy, healthy, well lives. Mrs Tyrrell talked about her kids not wanting to bring birthday party invitations and not wanting to bring school camp letters home because of the cost that would be put on the family. I remember that as a kid; I would not go and get a biscuit out of the biscuit tin because that was a luxury that need not be afforded when we simply did not have money. We all need to be very strategic in our thinking about what future decades of Victorian farmers need to be prepared for the challenges that are there

and need to be able to succeed, not only to remain viable as businesses but to be healthy, happy families and therefore healthy, happy communities.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:26): We the Nationals are really pleased today to support Mrs Tyrrell's motion on a very significant issue – the issue of the sustainability of our farmers, our primary producers, across Victoria. Mr Bourman was referencing a poem, the Dorothea Mackellar poem:

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains ...

and off it goes. We have had drought and our farmers across Australia have known drought for centuries: the federation drought; the World War II drought; the 1967–68 drought; the 1982–83 drought – I remember that one on our dairy farm at the time when interest rates were 17 per cent; think about how that works; the millennium drought that lasted so long and was so devastating, particularly in East Gippsland; and the 2019–20 drought. I certainly was up there on a number of occasions pre and post the devastating bushfires that ravaged that area. There is something very humbling about working with various charity organisations taking boxes of food to farmers who greet you at the door and who are actually struggling to keep their stock alive, to keep their families fed and to keep themselves from not doing what Mrs McArthur's poem very much focused on, and that is keeping people alive. Indeed this drought in western Victoria unfortunately is now reaching its way all the way into eastern Victoria and into my patch, certainly in West Gippsland, South Gippsland and the Bass area. I have had farmers contact me in Yinnar and that Morwell area, and they were hit too in that Latrobe Valley area in 2019–20.

Farmers by their nature do not do the 30-hour week or the 38-hour week; farmers by their nature do not take holidays. I know there are many stories, and I am sure we have heard them in recent times, where a farming family may get a holiday once every four or five years for a week away. Farmers by nature have broad shoulders, men and women farmers, and farmers by nature do not want a handout. But when there is no food on the table, when the fodder and your hay reserves have gone, your silage reserves have gone, your grain has gone, your dams are dry and there is dirt where there used to be grass or else there is dying grass, you need a hand up. We have heard today some of the speakers talk about coming together and the must-haves and we must support our farmers. Well, I feel this current government's coming together is not up to standard. It is not acceptable and it is insufficient in its entirety – \$67 million of government grant support is completely ineffective. We have heard of the importance of our farmers. They clothe us; they feed us; they drive our communities. Regionalisation comes off the back of primary producers. We do not want our small towns, our regional centres, to decay, because that would put more people back into the city, and that would have impact upon impact. We need to value our farmers.

In recent times I have had conversations in my town, in the supermarket, as you do. Farmers are really concerned about their animals. It galls me in the neck when we hear, as we have heard in past inquiries – the animal activist inquiry and others – that farmers are somehow hard people who just want to squeeze the living daylight out of their animals. Nothing could be further from the truth from my experience and my understanding.

During this crisis – and it is a crisis – this government and all of us need to understand the impact that is having at the kitchen table on farmers' mental health. You can talk about how we need to come together, but it needs to be demonstrated. I am speaking with rural financial counsellors, and they are saying the kitchen-table conversations that they are having with farmers are quite often on a daily basis to keep them away from a dark place. It is hugely important that this government recognises that. We have the seasons; we have animal welfare, which is primarily the focus; we have heartbreak; we have mental health issues. I know my colleague the member for Lowan, who is both the Shadow Minister for Agriculture and the Shadow Minister for Mental Health, is very strong on the need to support farmers through this terrible battle.

We have had, honestly, no grass growing. Victoria has experienced a little bit of rain, but it is not raining grass, and grass will not be growing until the spring – if we are lucky. Farmers also then take their cattle to market, and of course prices go down. If they are lucky, they can get agistment further away. Or they sell their stock, and then they do not have that breeding stock for when the drought finally breaks.

I want to also commend the Victorian Farmers Federation, who have come out very strongly in their position. If we need to come together, the government could certainly listen to what the VFF, the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria and others are saying. The Nationals and the Liberals certainly support the Victorian Farmers' call for a tiered drought response. To capture that, tier 2, moderate drought, includes activating infrastructure and reseeding grants, and I will speak to that shortly; hardship support; rate relief – the importance of getting that little bit of a rate break for farmers; assistance for family participation in education and mental health; but also and primarily cartage subsidies. I understand that it is very challenging to give direct grants for fodder – I understand there are a whole lot of implications there – but cartage subsidies for water and for fodder must be considered by this government, and there must be value in that in order to keep these people on their farms.

Finally, part of the discussion in this motion is around the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. I always struggle to say that, because it is not a fund. It is not for volunteers. We have seen the government over time, over the last two years, cut \$164 million out of the CFA, FRV and SES budgets; \$164 million has gone, has been reduced, has been cut. Yet we are having this new impost, this new tax – a 150 per cent increase on the previous levy – for farmers. Now there has been a reprieve, and we are all supposed to go cap in hand and thank the government for it. It is a stay of execution. That is what it is. It will come. It is for one year. If they were really serious about coming together and finding a strategic way of thinking, they would actually just cancel this tax. They would scrap the tax, and I vote that we do scrap the tax. The Nationals and the Liberals will scrap the tax when we come into government in 2026, but we will fund the FRV, SES and CFA. We will fund them properly.

This government has decided to blow out the black hole in the budget to \$194 billion in debt over the forward estimates. This motion is very important. We support this motion, we support our farmers, we back our farmers, and if we are having must-haves, we must have a focus on this drought and a focus on the people that feed and clothe us. We must come together and we must support our farmers. I commend Mrs Tyrrell for bringing this motion forward.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:36): I also rise to make a contribution on this motion brought forward by Mrs Tyrrell, and I thank her for her advocacy in regard to this matter. I might be the first city-based MP to speak on this motion this morning. We have heard contributions from many regional colleagues, so I want to also thank them for their contributions. I do want to make mention of Mr McIntosh's contribution, which I thought was a very thoughtful and considered contribution from someone who spoke with lived experience – experience of him growing up on a farm and his father's experience in managing some of the challenges that we are talking about today in being a farmer. What I heard coming through in Mr McIntosh's contribution was just how nimble his father was in coming up with solutions to help manage the difficult times, but also what became clear in Mr McIntosh's contribution were the ongoing challenges that we face in Australia due to climate change.

Australia is already a country of droughts and flooding rains, and we have heard other contributors talk about that today. Droughts are not new in Australia and they are not new for farming communities, but what we are seeing with climate change is that we know that there will be floods that are more severe, there will be droughts that are also more severe and we will have less water over time. These are the challenges Mr McIntosh articulated so well: if you do not have water, you do not have grass that grows and therefore you cannot feed your cattle. And you have the impacts of the war in Ukraine that are also driving up prices.

I will not use the term in here because it is unparliamentary, but it is a cluster-bleep of challenges that are coming together to put immense pressure on farming communities. As a city-based MP, I want to acknowledge that our farming community feed us and clothe us, and in Victoria we are lucky in the sense that Victoria is one of the most impressive food bowls in Australia. So much farming and so many agricultural items, whether you want to call it food or clothing or whatever, come out of Victoria. The produce that we produce here is amazing and it is sought after all around the world. We know our farmers produce really good products, and we recognise that.

Having said that, I am going to go to some of the things that our government is providing but also some of the information that I think has been disappointing to see. There was an article I read in the news this morning about the disinformation and misinformation that has been used in this debate, and I am going to go to that today, but I am going to do so in a very sensitive manner because I like to talk about research but I also like to talk about organisations that are accredited to make those comments and contributions. I will come back to that shortly.

Our government has provided direct support, drought relief, of \$69 million to farmers across Victoria impacted by drought and difficult seasonal conditions: \$5000 on-farm drought infrastructure grants; technical decision-making support; Look Over the Farm Gate mental health and wellbeing programs; the Rural Financial Counselling Service; the National Centre for Farmer Health support resources and programs; capping the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund at 2024–25 rates; \$1.8 million to fast-track the assessment of lethal and non-lethal control permits for kangaroos and to support farmers with a rebate to engage commercial shooters; streamlining processes and waiving fees associated with fodder entering Victoria without compromising our strict biodiversity controls; additional south-west support of \$10,000 in on-farm drought infrastructure grants; the south-west drought coordinator; the south-west small business financial counsellor; additional capacity for the Rural Financial Counselling Service in the south-west, as well as one-on-one mental health and support; Victorian drought freight network released to allow freight road trains up to 84 tonnes to transport critical grain and fodder to Victorian farms.

That is just a very quick overview of the things that we have introduced. And of course the Premier has now stood up a Drought Response Taskforce. This is in direct response to the challenging seasonal, economic and social conditions. On 30 May 2025 the Premier announced that the Drought Response Taskforce would be established. The Premier is chairing that taskforce. It includes the Minister for Regional Development Jaclyn Symes, Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence, Minister for Water Gayle Tierney and many, many other people who have deep connections to rural and regional communities. Also on 30 May \$37.7 million was committed to on-farm drought infrastructure grants, as I said earlier. So there are many, many things that are targeted and tailored to regional and rural communities but with specific assistance for farmers.

One of the things that has been talked about – it was touched on in my earlier comments about Look Over the Farm Gate – is a program designed to assist farmers with mental health challenges. I just want to say that in researching this matter I wanted to look at what research had been done on the mental health of farmers. I was able to find a report done by the Centre of Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention, an organisation that brought together collaborative partners such as the Black Dog Institute, University of New South Wales, Australian National University, Deakin University, University of Newcastle, Uni of Melbourne, Orygen, Macquarie University, University of Sydney, Lifeline and Everymind – some very eminent organisations who are well credentialed to study the impacts of suicide. According to their report, suicide is the most common cause of death in Australia for people between 15 and 44 years of age. It is more common than motor vehicle accidents or skin cancer and the 10th most common cause of death overall for Australian males. In rural communities – and this is coming from this report, and I am happy to provide it to Hansard so they have got all the details – suicide is a critical issue, and focusing on the underlying causes that contribute to the tragic outcome is important. It is also important for understanding how you can develop tools for essential prevention strategies tailored to the unique challenges faced by rural populations.

In the report it talks about one of the primary factors contributing to rural suicide being limited access to mental healthcare services. This report also then goes on to talk about how you can have more online services or other services that can be accessed rather than in a physical presence, whether that is online support or telehealth or those other sorts of things. But research indicates that more than 50 per cent of people who die by suicide have not been in contact with healthcare services before their attempt, which highlights a significant gap in early intervention. And this goes into some other anecdotal evidence and information that I saw from the Country Women's Association, talking about their husbands as farmers and the fact that they are reluctant to reach out to get assistance. This then also talks about the social isolation and lack of connectedness as critical contributors:

Rural residents may face physical isolation due to distance and limited transportation ...

... cultural factors and stigma around mental health and suicide in rural areas can prevent individuals from seeking help. There is often a strong cultural emphasis on self-reliance and privacy, which may discourage open discussion about mental health struggles. Research exploring suicide stigma in Australia highlights how these attitudes can be barriers to effective intervention.

... occupational risks are relevant in rural settings, where certain industries such as agriculture, mining, and construction are prevalent. These occupations may involve high stress, physical danger, and access to lethal means, all of which increase suicide risk.

As you can see, for many men and women as well who are running farms, the challenges are immense, and we have highlighted why that is today. But I would urge everybody in this chamber and anyone who wants to talk about this issue to please consider those families who are connected to people who have suicided. I myself have a family member who has committed suicide, and I can tell you this: there are families attached to these people. There are children, there are friends and there are connections. All of them do not want this. What they want is help for those people who are considering this. That is what farming communities and farmers want as well. They want us to come together and provide assistance and help – mental health supports. The weaponisation of this – I have found it breathtaking and inappropriate. I have talked to my regional colleagues who sit in this chamber on the government benches, and they have confirmed that what rural communities and farmers are seeking is help. The weaponisation of this is really inappropriate. So again, our government is working with rural and regional communities –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: The interjections from the other side of the chamber, again, just go to the points that I made that when there is an opportunity for bipartisanship to come together on an issue such as this, which is very sensitive and critically important, banging on about attacks as a campaigning tactic is highly inappropriate because again it goes to the weaponisation of people who are suffering as a result of a range of factors which I just talked about. Again, I urge everybody in this chamber to please deal with this issue in a very sensitive manner. I thank Mrs Tyrrell again for her considered advocacy in regard to this matter and, as I think Mr McIntosh said, the government will not be opposing this motion.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (11:46): I rise to also speak on Mrs Tyrrell's motion. I thank her for bringing it to the house, because this is a terribly important issue for the constituents in Northern Victoria and also in Western Victoria and Eastern Victoria, right throughout country Victoria at the moment, where we are suffering horrendous droughts.

I have been a member of this place for 22½ years, and I have seen many, many things that have impacted on my electorate in that time. I am often heard to say that farmers are the eternal optimists, because if it is not fires, it is drought, or it is a plague of mice or locusts or it is floods – it is just never-ending for them. I can say that, when I was first elected in 2002, we actually had bushfires that summer up in the north-east. We had bushfires again, the great alpine fires, in 2006. Of course in 2009 we had the horrendous Black Saturday fires and in 2019–20 again, the Black Summer fires. We have had floods in 2011 and 2022 and also in 2010. We have had mice and locust plagues within that time. We

have had drought in 2019–20, and of course for the first 10 years of this millennium we had the millennium drought.

I was first elected in 2002, and during that campaign the drought was very much spoken about as went around the electorate campaigning. I remember being at the Elmore Field Days and hearing one farmer tell a story. He actually spoke about the Ansett collapse, because Ansett had collapsed in 2001, it was still in the papers in 2002 and there was a tremendous amount of support offered to those Ansett workers to tide them over until they got new jobs or to retrain them for new jobs. The farmer actually said, 'I feel really sorry for the Ansett workers, but the reality is there is assistance for them to tide them through this really difficult time. And the reality is that they will stay in their same homes, and they will retrain or apply for other jobs and be able to move on with their lives relatively soon.' But he said, 'You imagine for a farmer, when you lose your income, as you do during a drought, you not only lose your income, but you run the risk of losing your farm. And sometimes that farm has been in the family for generations, and you're the one that is going to lose that farm. So you lose your home, your job – you lose your family history.'

I can remember many kitchen table conversations with people who were suffering from drought. I remember one particularly. It was a dairy farming family and it was absolutely heartbreaking, because the father broke down in tears as he told me he had told his daughter he could not afford to send her to university the next year. She had just completed her year 12 and he could not afford for her to continue her studies. But he also said for his daughter who was halfway through her degree at university, he had had to tell her that she would have to withdraw from university because the family could not afford to keep her at university. This is an additional impact on farming families. To educate your children at university, you more than likely have to send them away to Melbourne or to one of the larger regional cities like Bendigo to access a university. It is an additional cost because there is the cost of accommodation as well as the everyday cost of a university education. It is heartbreaking to think families are telling children, 'We can't educate you because of the impact of the drought.'

We know that kids are coming to school hungry. Many of the breakfast programs in our schools were started during the millennium drought because kids were coming to school hungry. I remember taking Louise Asher to a meeting of the wives of a group of irrigators from around Rochester who had not had an allocation for about three years. There were so many tears at that meeting that I actually had to go to the supermarket and buy a box of tissues. Louise Asher said to me, 'As metropolitan members, we don't face these things in our electorates.' But in country Victoria, as country members of Parliament, we face these things day in, day out. It is not only the stories during the drought, it is the stories during bushfires, it is the stories during floods. It is difficult.

I remember during that millennium drought our federal member Sharman Stone used to live across the road from me, and if we saw each other's lights on we would often debrief at night. We would debrief about things like how many farmers had rung in and talked about committing suicide that week. I remember one day my father was there while we were talking and he said, 'At the end of the day, you've dealt with all of this. What do you do?' We said, 'We call the mental health counsellors. We send them out to do a cold call to see whether it's just a threat or whether it really is an emergency, and the mental health workers deal with it.' He said, 'But then who counsels you?' In those days we did not get much support.

We all know that when something is happening, like during COVID, we are offered support left, right and centre in this place. Things have changed, and in the workplaces around the city there is plenty of mental health support for workers when they are going through tough times. But in the country, that support is not there for our farmers. In fact if you look at the government's website that they have set up for the drought support package and you go to the bit that talks about their mental health support, 'Statewide mental health and wellbeing support' – this is a package the government announced weeks ago – it says:

A 'Look Over the Farm Gate' mental health and wellbeing grant program will be available –

will be available –

statewide to help communities come together and support farmers and farming families under stress.

More information will be available soon.

That information is needed now – not to be available soon; that information and support is needed now. It is not like this is a new thing that the government did not know they were going to need. The drought has been impacting parts of our state for many, many months now – in fact for years now. We have also been through the recent floods. They have seen the impact that they had on communities then. They knew they needed mental health support for people.

The loss of farmers' blood lines for their cattle will have a horrendous impact on their future livelihoods as well. As they cannot access fodder to feed their cattle, we are seeing more and more entire herds being taken to the abattoirs. This is really having a huge impact on farmers' mental health. Their animals are like family to them, but also those blood lines have been carefully, carefully bred over generations of cattle to make sure that they are either the highest producing dairy cows or the best beef cattle that they can possibly produce. The loss of those blood lines will not come back quickly to our state. This will impact on our state's productivity, and it will impact for a very long time.

I have already spoken a lot about mental health, but Mrs McArthur's poem, the line that said the father said to the son, 'I know that road because I have walked every mile' – I feel like that, because over the last 22 years I have walked every mile with my community. I know that we need far more assistance for our farmers, and we need it now. What we need is a support package for this drought, not a support package for the next drought. I understand that governments cannot make it rain, but there are many things that governments can do to assist farmers now. The \$5000 infrastructure grants are an absolute joke because they need a match component. It costs to get all your financials together, and farmers cannot invest in their farms when they cannot even feed their animals or their families. Those infrastructure grants – (*Time expired*)

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:56): I also rise to speak to the motion that has been put before the house today by Mrs Tyrrell. As many other colleagues have done, I would like to acknowledge and thank Mrs Tyrrell for her longstanding advocacy on both this issue and issues surrounding support for our primary industries and our farmers. I also acknowledge her great bravery and fortitude in sharing what was a very personal story from her experience as a farming family in the north of Victoria. It was a very moving contribution to hear, and I would like to particularly acknowledge her for that. It was moving and important because it so well highlighted the sorts of issues that we are discussing here today and the severity. From the speeches I have heard in the chamber today from across the house, especially those regional members who have spoken, members have had stories to share from all corners of the house. When it comes to discussing these issues, it just underscores the importance.

There has been and there continues to be work done to support farmers affected by drought across the state. We know that there are particular areas that have been the target of focus, and that has in many cases been expanded out and those support measures have been expanded out statewide. We know that just a few weeks ago an additional \$37.7 million was committed to the on-farm drought infrastructure grant program, which provides grants of up to \$5000, or, in the case of those perhaps hardest hit in south-west Victoria, up to \$10,000. There are also measures being implemented as part of the taskforce, including with the waiving of any increase to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund for all primary industry across the state so that they can focus on the most important thing right now, and that is getting through these drought conditions. That is one of the most important things that they have on their plate. That is why the government and indeed the Treasurer have taken the courageous but very strong and wise decision to suspend that for primary producers. As a result, primary producers across the state of Victoria will pay no more than what they would have in the current and previous years.

There is significantly more work to be done, and that is why it is so important that the taskforce that the Premier has put together, reaching across from different parts of industry, indeed from across the chambers in this building as well, is so important – to be as quick, to be as effective and to be as responsive as possible in order to provide the best and most on-point and reliable support for our primary producers right across the state.

There are many, many more things I could talk in great detail on, and I am mindful that I will be cut off quite shortly. Perhaps we will come back to it after question time. But when it comes to the question of drought support, it is something that we have spent quite a bit of time in this place talking about in the last few weeks in particular, but it is something that our farming communities have been facing for months – well over a year in some cases. We have seen what has been termed the ‘green drought’, where appearances of greenery are often nothing more than a misty facade to be blown away as quickly as the wind changes. And indeed we have had some modest –

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, Mr Galea. I have to interrupt your contribution for questions and ministers statements.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Women in sport

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:00): (949) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place. The recent budget defunded the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation and the preventing violence through sport grants program, both immensely successful and the first of their kind in Australia. With a comparatively small budget and few staff, the office had provided 580 grants to community sports clubs and organisations across Victoria, facilitated the *Fair Access Policy Roadmap* and administered the Change Our Game initiative. Key stakeholders and the wider public have been left completely in the dark on this decision. The only information from the government on this decision is that the functions of the office will continue within Sport and Recreation Victoria. Could the minister outline how exactly the government will now continue to support women’s sport?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:01): This is a matter for the Minister for Community Sport, and it will be referred to her. I thank the member for her ongoing interest in women’s participation in sport.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:01): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. Will the minister commit to meeting with key stakeholders such as Women Sport Australia and the advocacy group Not All Clubs to provide further detail to them about this decision?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:01): The supplementary question will be referred to the minister. Of course the minister may have already met some of the stakeholders that you have referred to, and it clearly is a matter for the minister to determine who she meets with.

Public sector review

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:01): (950) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to the report produced or being produced by Helen Silver and ask: has all or part of this report or a summary of it been made available to international rating agencies before it is released to the Victorian community?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:02): I thank Mr Davis for his question, and yes, I can confirm, as I have publicly, that Helen Silver AO has been engaged to undertake an independent review of the public sector. That review and report is due to me at the end of the month. I have committed to making that

public alongside a government response in relation to provision of that to anybody in advance of a final report.

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: No. You asked about rating agencies. I was in New York last week, and I met with the three relevant rating agencies to the state of Victoria, and I brought to the attention of all three of them Helen Silver's work and gave a high-level overview of what I have asked her to look at, and that was something that they were interested in. When the final report is made public it will be provided to anybody that is interested.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): As I understand, Minister, you did actually indicate to the house that the report would be released in June.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: You did say that actually – you did.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: In February. I will get you the date. I read it just before. The report –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: You said you will get it in June. When will it thereby be released to the Victorian community? What date?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:03): I was extremely clear with the community and particularly the media when I announced the review and when I announced the terms of reference and that the timeline for the review would be that the report would be presented to me by the end of June. As I have repeated on a number of occasions, it is of course my intention to make the report public. Mr Davis, because this report impacts on people that are employed in the public service, it is responsible to ensure that in releasing the report there is a government response. So I have not committed to releasing the report upon receipt; I have committed to releasing the report alongside a government response. I expect that there is a lot of interest in the report. I have no intention of delaying a release, but I will take the time to ensure that the proper processes are undertaken, which might include cabinet processes.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:05): I rise to update the house on the recently refreshed ministerial youth advisory group, known as MYAG, which I co-chair alongside one of the appointed members. Since 2019 MYAG has given invaluable advice to the minister of the day about what works well and what can be done better within the child protection and care systems. MYAG members have current or recent experience living in our care systems. Members of MYAG reflect the diversity of the community and have experience of all care types – kinship, foster, permanent and residential. The lived experience of MYAG members is vital in providing insight to me in my role and to our government as a whole in our work to care for children and young people who cannot live with their family.

As well as the regular meetings, MYAG also has a strong development platform from which members are able to participate in other forums and opportunities. I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the commitment and contribution of all previous MYAG members who have been a part of MYAG since 2019. I want to particularly acknowledge the outgoing co-chair for her leadership, insights and stewardship of MYAG since 2019. She has been widely recognised for her leadership and mentorship of other young people. Over these years MYAG members have provided input into many reforms and investments of this government. The Better Futures and Home Stretch reforms stand out as highlights. Our government's record investment in the 2023–24 state budget –

\$548 million to ensure all young people have access to therapeutic supports in residential care – was directly informed by the experiences of the young people on MYAG.

In 2022 MYAG received the Child and Youth Empowerment Award at the Victorian Protecting Children Awards. MYAG continues to be an important platform through which young people with lived experience of the Victorian child protection and care systems have a direct voice to the Victorian government about their experiences. I am committed to the value and importance of MYAG, and I look forward to meeting with the group again next month.

Waste and recycling management

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:07): (951) My question is for the Minister for Environment. The 7.30 report recently ran a story on how Australia is embracing waste to energy, raising questions for what this means for our environment, our health and the future of waste management. Alarming, this report noted that six waste-to-energy plants are planned in Victoria, two in New South Wales and one in Queensland. Not only is Victoria leading the country when it comes to waste to energy, but we have more proposals here than all other Australian jurisdictions combined. All the while, Recycling Victoria continues to call for expressions of interest for even more companies to open even more plants. So my question is: why is the minister making Victoria the waste-to-energy capital of Australia?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:08): Thank you, Ms Payne, for that question. The question will be referred to the Minister for Environment for a response as per the standing orders.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:08): I thank the minister for referring my question on. By way of supplementary, waste to energy produces greenhouse gases, is banned in the ACT, locks councils into decade-long contracts to generate a minimum amount of rubbish, undermines the circular economy, creates waste and pollutants and lacks social licence. At the same time, the proportion of waste going to landfill has not changed in the four years since the Victorian government started their circular economy policy. Can the minister advise when they will consider a moratorium on waste to energy until these concerns are addressed?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:08): I thank Ms Payne for her question. The supplementary, as with the substantive, will be referred to the Minister for Environment.

Government contracts

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): (952) My question is again for the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to the VAGO report tabled today on contractors and consultants and note the auditor's finding that:

... departments are not required to and do not consistently report to the public on how much they spend on contractors. This results in a lack of transparency about how they use public funds.

At recommendation 2 the AG recommended that the guidance note to financial reporting direction 22 be amended to ensure that the definitions of 'contractor' and 'consultant' are mutually exclusive and clear, to be consistent and comparable across the public sector. Will the Treasurer implement the recommendation of the Auditor-General in full?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:09): I thank Mr Davis for his question, and I thank VAGO for their work in relation to this important matter. In relation to the implementation of recommendations, it would not be just a matter for the Treasurer, Mr Davis. There are responsibilities of departments under the Financial Management Act and their various secretaries and the like, and I am sure that the recommendations from VAGO will be considered in great detail.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): These are wishy-washy responses, and I note the Treasurer's half-baked answer there that she will not necessarily implement that recommendation in full. Recommendation 1 by the Auditor in today's report sought amendment of a financial reporting direction:

... to report their spending on contractors in their annual reports would improve public transparency ...

I therefore ask the Treasurer: will the government insist that agencies report spending on contractors, as outlined by the Auditor, in their annual reports?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:11): Mr Davis, I expect all government departments and agencies to comply with their responsibilities in relation to their annual reporting.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, that is not the answer. I asked the Treasurer: will the government insist that they report according to the Auditor's approach in their annual reports. She has not answered that. She has just given a very vague –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister did answer the question.

Ministers statements: drought

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:11): I rise to update the chamber on a productive second meeting of the drought taskforce in Shepparton last Friday. We know farmers in the south-west of Victoria and across our state face incredibly tough conditions due to record low rainfall. We are working to deliver whole-of-government relief where it is needed most. Friday's taskforce meeting focused on expanding access to affordable water for agriculture, and I thank the taskforce members for their considered input. Informed by taskforce members, I have already taken action by advocating to the Commonwealth to, firstly, pause all Victorian buybacks during this drought; two, publicly release buyback impact modelling; and three, prioritise federal funding for drought-relevant water infrastructure. In particular I wish to thank the Victorian Farmers Federation for joining my advocacy for a pause to buybacks. I have also promoted full transparency of all Commonwealth buybacks to date through a dedicated water register portal.

In partnership with our water corporations, we are also updating the public database for water carting points; providing hardship relief for water bills; establishing a dedicated water trading room for south-west farmers; identifying options for temporary water infrastructure, including recycled water; and delivering long-term water infrastructure, including \$9.1 million of additional investment in the East Grampians rural pipeline project, confirmed in the latest budget papers. As I indicated to the taskforce members, I am an action-orientated minister. We have already delivered support through the water portfolio for our farmers, and we will continue to do so in consultation with taskforce members and local communities.

Kids Helpline

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:13): (953) My question today is for the Minister for Mental Health. Kids Helpline is Australia's only free online and phone counselling service for young people aged five to 25 years old. It is delivered by charity organisation Yourtown. In 2024 the Kids Helpline responded to over 130,000 calls from across Australia, with 18 per cent of those calls coming from Victoria. It has been reported that Yourtown requested funding from the Victorian government for the 2025–26 financial year to help meet the increasing demand for the service. Can the minister please confirm Kids Helpline requested \$4.4 million from the government before the delivery of the 2024–25 state budget?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:14): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her question. It is an important issue. I know

in regional Victoria in particular having suicide prevention and mental health supports is incredibly important for the community, whether that is dealing with significant emergency situations and the debate that we have been having in this place today around drought or whether that is more generally because of other issues to do with mental health and wellbeing. Of course there were important recommendations contained in the royal commission's final report around making sure that we were looking at consolidating and supporting the important mental health support lines that exist. There are a number of those that the Victorian government continues to fund, including Lifeline. In relation to Kids Helpline, this is an organisation that is predominantly supported through the Commonwealth government, but I do want to acknowledge that they do play a particular role and obviously support a particular cohort of young people.

I want to also make it clear that the Victorian government works closely with the Commonwealth on all of our mental health reforms, including most recently at a ministers meeting. We agreed that young people would be a key focus for our investment and reform work at both Commonwealth and state and territory levels. In Victoria we are doing some important work to increase services available for young people, particularly in regional Victoria, including youth prevention and recovery centres. We will be building one of those in each of our regions, which includes five new centres. That is a \$141 million investment.

We have also done significant work to ensure that our school system has mental health supports embedded within each of those state schools, including \$200 million for a mental health fund and menu, which was designed by taking from all of the great lessons out of the early childhood program and system. They are important services that are available for children and their families through the school system, and the Allan Labor government is very proud to continue to support that.

We have a number of other suicide prevention initiatives. We have recently released our suicide prevention strategy, and all of this goes to complement those other important services such as Kids Helpline, Lifeline and other phone lines that support Victorians.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:17): I thank the minister for her reply. Kids Helpline estimates that around 40 per cent of calls from young people in distress go unanswered due to limited resources. The Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales governments, as well as the federal government, all provided funding to Kids Helpline, with the New South Wales Labor government announcing in November last year a funding investment of \$17.1 million. Can the minister explain why Victoria does not value the important work of the Kids Helpline as much as other states?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:18): I do not accept the premise of that supplementary question. In my substantive answer I did acknowledge the really important work that Kids Helpline do, and they are a very respected organisation right across the country. There are many examples of where different states and territories make different contributions to different services, and Victoria is probably, I would argue on the evidence and on the facts, providing more investment and doing more in mental health reform than any other jurisdiction in the country. We will continue of course proudly to work with the Commonwealth, who are also investing in important services for mental health supports for all Australians, and we will work cooperatively across jurisdictions. But to suggest that we do not really value the work of this organisation is misleading.

Suburban Rail Loop

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:19): (954) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, in regard to the value capture amount required of around \$11.5 billion, Marion Terrill, an independent infrastructure expert, said the following:

These three mechanisms wouldn't raise anywhere remotely close to \$12 billion. The stamp duty on property across all kinds of properties raises \$7 billion – so the idea in a few local environments you could somehow get more than that is ludicrous.

The CBD parking levy is small change – it's about \$100 million. It's not even a rounding error on the amount needed. And the developer charges would just make homes more expensive, which isn't the solution Melbourne needs right now.

How will the government raise the \$11.5 billion required?

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:20): Just to pick up on what Ms Terpstra has so sagely contributed to this discussion, this is a question that has been asked before, and I am very happy to answer it again for avoidance of any doubt. Mr Mulholland, value capture and funding and finance strategies are processes for being able to deliver on nation-building infrastructure that are not unique to this project. This is where, again, we will continue to step through the process through a range of funding streams. As you know, we have completed design work for the SRL between Cheltenham and Box Hill, and it is under construction. The sites have been operational since 2022, Mr Mulholland, and the cost of this stage is on budget and the project is on time. The value capture mechanisms –

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: Well, Mr Mulholland, if you want to hear the answer to the question, then I am very happy to provide it to you, but if all you want to do is describe the problem and run a narrative of interjections, then I am not sure what you are doing wanting answers in question time.

The SRL precincts are the work that sits at the heart of the value capture mechanisms, and we have been up-front in the Suburban Rail Loop business and investment case from August 2022. The value capture measures will be targeted at commercial property developers who will receive windfall financial gains from the project and, as I indicated in response to a question yesterday, that 1600-metre area in and around those station areas and the measures will not be targeted at current residential properties, home owners or residents. I just again want to underscore: value capture is not unique to this project; it is not a new phenomenon.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Harriet SHING: Mr Mulholland, I will take you to your interjection. You said it is a big amount. Yes, it is a big amount, and it is a big project. It is a necessary project that will make sure that as Melbourne moves to becoming a city the size of London by the 2050s we have the infrastructure necessary to support the delivery of tens of thousands of new homes across SRL East – 70,000 homes – and that we have the capacity to deliver jobs and a proximity to work and to recreation closer to where people live. We are bringing world-class transport to those areas, and this is something which I know a number of your colleagues, Mr Mulholland, wholeheartedly support. This is something that we will make sure developers are in a position to contribute to because of the significant financial benefit that they will receive, and it will also be informed by precinct and planning work that, as you know, is underway in consultation with communities and residents.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:23): Thank you, Minister. I note your commentary that you are working through a range of funding streams and will be looking at

commercial property developers that would seek to gain a windfall paying that value capture. With that I ask: is it government policy to impose a congestion levy in the SRL precincts?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:23): Mr Mulholland, I will go back to the answer that I have given you to this question, the substantive question and answers previously: the value capture mechanisms that we are developing are part of making sure we can deliver on this project. The envelope of the \$34.5 billion in the ‘a third, a third, a third’ model – that again is set out in the business case.

David Davis interjected.

Harriet SHING: We will continue to work through the business and investment case, Mr Davis. We will continue to work through value capture –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I had a very narrow question about whether it is government policy to impose a congestion levy in SRL precincts.

The PRESIDENT: I will call the minister to continue.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Mulholland. It is government policy to make sure that when we deliver the Suburban Rail Loop, which is currently on time and on budget, we are in a position to do so through a range of mechanisms: Commonwealth funding, state funding and value capture.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:24): I rise to update the house on how Development Victoria is engaging with the market to build more homes, more jobs and more opportunities for all Victorians. Two weeks ago I attended the topping-out ceremony of the Melbourne Quarter West Tower at Mr Welch’s favourite precinct, Docklands. We all know that Docklands is a beating heart, with public transport, the iconic wharves and Marvel Stadium – recently voted the best stadium in Australia – making the precinct a hive of activity. It was really fantastic to join the event with federal minister for housing and cities Clare O’Neil, the newly elected federal member for Melbourne Sarah Witty and the Mayor of the City of Melbourne Nick Reece.

Melbourne Quarter West is Lendlease’s final tower in the Melbourne Quarter mixed-use precinct. This is a 2.5-hectare site. It is a visionary joint venture between Lendlease and the Japanese consortium Daiwa House, and of the 2.5 hectares, half of that space will be open, public-realm space, which again shows a range of really careful and considered decisions around design and development.

Development Vic has been working with Lendlease since 2013 to help deliver this precinct. It has been long-term work, it has been careful work and it shows the value of Development Victoria in the way in which we are growing and growing well. When this project is complete next year, there will be 797 new build-to-rent residences with a range of studio and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments across the tower’s 45 levels. This is Australia’s largest build-to-rent project, and the new residents will join the already 17,500 residents who call Docklands home. Sixteen of these apartments will be rented for a 15-year period at a 20 per cent discount to the Melbourne Water residential build-to-rent market rents. They will support the housing statement, and they will make sure that as we grow we are growing well, with amenity, connection and opportunities for everyone to be connected to the places that they love.

Western suburbs truck traffic

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:27): (955) My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight in the other place. The Port of Melbourne’s draft 30-year strategy forecasts an extra 20,000 trucks per day visiting the port in 2050 and that bigger trucks and more night-time traffic will be required to meet demand. People in the west already report having to deal with heavy truck traffic

to and from the port and face high levels of pollution and consequently higher rates of asthma and lung cancer. Will the government bring forward the port rail shuttle project to be completed before 2030, shifting some of the containers onto rail and reducing the need for trucks?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:27): I thank Mr Puglielli for his question, and I will refer it accordingly.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:27): I thank the minister for referring that on. Given the predicted doubling of truck traffic, can the minister provide any modelling that has been undertaken to demonstrate the flow-on impacts of this change on the community, such as on air quality, and confirm whether she has been consulted on declaring a low-emissions zone for the western suburbs with the highest levels of truck traffic, only allowing trucks with Euro 5 levels of emissions or better to enter the zone?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:28): I thank Mr Puglielli for his supplementary and will refer it accordingly.

Prison workplace safety

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:28): (956) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the repeated assault of prison guards has become a serious problem in Victorian prisons. The assault of a guard by a violent prisoner that has resulted in injury is completely and utterly unacceptable. The secretary of the public sector union has said there need to be ‘immediate consequences’ for assaulting an officer, further saying:

Breaches of health and safety outside in the street need to also apply behind prison walls.

Minister, will the government immediately adopt the opposition’s policy, which will ensure that any prisoner who has assaulted a prison guard will be escorted around the prison in handcuffs for three months?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:29): I thank Mr McCracken for his question and his interest in our corrections system. From the outset, let me say that every worker in our state deserves to be safe, especially our hardworking corrections staff that are on the front line keeping our community safe. As a government we do not just talk about safety, we are also implementing changes. As we speak in this chamber, in the other place they are debating legislation that is designed to ensure that there are tougher consequences for those that assault our staff.

And one of those tough new consequences or additional consequences will be additional prison time, which does act as a significant deterrent in terms of the behaviour, because we know people in prison, many of them, look forward to their release date. And that legislation was drafted in consultation, based on the feedback of our frontline workers and their union, the CPSU, who I do want to thank as well for their engagement in the drafting of that and the preparation and consultation of that legislation.

In relation to the specific policy, I must admit it is unusual to have any policy development from those opposite, and so it is an unusual position you have put me in, having to respond to a thought bubble. But what I will say is it is important to clarify that handcuff use is quite common in the adult corrections system, because the frontline staff already have the tools to be able to implement those. I would say, where appropriate, handcuffs should be placed and they are placed. I will leave those assessments to the experts working on the front line. Arbitrary limits of three months – in many instances some prisoners might need to be on handcuff regimes for much longer if their behaviour does not change and where they pose a real risk to safety of staff. So in terms of the period of time in which handcuffs will be placed, people’s behaviour changes over the time they are with us in the system. You make the case-by-case assessment of the risk posed to staff, and staff accordingly will use cuffs where needed, and that is appropriate.

But as a minister I am always open to making changes and improvements to safety – it is something I take very seriously. Even before my time in this place, in my previous career, I was a personal injury lawyer and I saw firsthand the impact this has on staff, on their family members, on their loved ones, and I am committed to making sure that our system is as safe as possible, understanding that prisons are dynamic and complex and challenging environments. That is why I am very thankful, and I want to place on record my deep thanks to all our staff that do this work to keep our community safe. But there is obviously more that needs to be done on the feedback of staff, and we are looking at changes. I have asked the department to look at, where we can, our policies around restraints, look at our policies around OC spray, look at our policies on barriers. So we are doing that work. We have legislation. If those opposite are serious about making our prison system safer, when the debate comes to this chamber I look forward to you, Mr McCracken, and everyone across the benches supporting our legislation to make our prison system as safe as possible for our frontline staff.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:32): Thank you so much for that response, Minister. Will you confirm that under the government's weak foreshadowed changes, in the circumstance that a prisoner bashes a staffer who is not a guard, that prisoner will not face the foreshadowed higher sanctions? Is that true or not?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: A bit of quiet. Mr McCracken to repeat the question.

Joe McCracken: I am happy to repeat. Minister, will you confirm that under the government's weak foreshadowed changes, in the circumstance that a prisoner bashes a staffer who is not a guard, that prisoner will not face the foreshadowed higher sanctions?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:33): I thank Mr McCracken for his supplementary question. I note that we are anticipating a debate that we will also be having in this chamber very shortly – I do note that – but I think it is an important policy discussion to have, Mr McCracken. I think it is clear that the people on the front line that are keeping us safe, especially in correctional environments, are our corrections staff, and that is why the legislation is specifically designed to protect them, because assaults on other people in our prison system are actually quite rare, but in the instance where there is disruptive or dangerous behaviour it is our corrections staff that intervene to ensure people are kept safe at the premises. I think when this debate comes to this chamber we will have more to say. But what I can confirm today is that they are the protectors and the barrier between prisoners and other professionals in our system. That is why corrections workers overwhelmingly are the target, because they are keeping us safe.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, this was a very, very narrow question about the government's own policy, asking whether those who are bashed who are not prison guards will have the prisoner skate free. Now, either yes or no is the answer.

The PRESIDENT: I thought the minister was pretty clear in the answer. It was clear who the legislation was going to cover in the first 30 seconds when he answered the question. But, Minister, you have got 5 seconds if you would like.

Enver ERDOGAN: I invite Mr Davis to get with the times. It is prison officers, not prison guards.

Ministers statements: Victorian Homebuyer Fund

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:35): I would like to update the house on how the Allan Labor government's Victorian Homebuyer Fund is giving more Victorians a chance to buy a home. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund contributes up to 25 per cent of the price of a home, or 35 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households, and reduces the required deposit to just 5 per cent, helping buyers to avoid paying lenders mortgage insurance. The median household participating in

the fund saves around \$3000 per year on mortgage repayments compared to the average Victorian mortgage holder. As of April, the fund has helped over 15,000 Victorian households to buy their own home, and it is still going strong. But the biggest vote of confidence obviously is that the program is now being rolled out across the country in the form of the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund is scheduled to wrap up on 30 June. However, with the Commonwealth scheme not yet up and running, I am very pleased to confirm that the Victorian fund will remain open until the program's allocation has been exhausted.

We want as many Victorians as possible to take up the opportunity to buy a home through the program and not be impacted by the gap. Victoria is number one in the country for approving and completing new homes and number one for first homebuyers, accounting for more than 30 per cent of first homebuyer loans in Australia. Our housing policies are disciplined and effective. We build homes where Victorians want to live, and we help them buy those homes. I am pleased to see the rest of Australia will soon get to benefit from a highly successful Victorian policy, once the Commonwealth scheme kicks off.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:37): That ends questions and ministers statements. Minister Blandthorn will get Mr Puglielli answers from the Minister for Ports and Freight under standing orders. Minister Tierney will get answers for Ms Purcell and Ms Payne under standing orders from the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Community Sport respectively.

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell: On a point of order, President, my question 929 to the Minister for Environment from 28 May has not been answered yet.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Tierney will commit to follow that up.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:38): (1640) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it concerns the Allan Labor government's landmark Metro Tunnel project. We know – especially constituents of mine in the south-east and indeed constituents of colleagues in the west – that this is going to be a transformational change to our rail network with the Pakenham and Cranbourne line linking through to the Sunbury line through the brand new Metro Tunnel, which is of course opening, Mr Davis, a year ahead of schedule. But the question today concerns the Frankston line for other constituents of mine in the south-east. I ask the minister to update the house on how the new Metro Tunnel will support and improve services on the Frankston line.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:38): (1641) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture and relates to the crippling drought. On 15 May the government announced an expanded on-farm infrastructure grants program for drought-affected primary producers in Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Cardinia, South Gippsland other LGAs. Five weeks on, the grant is not open. My farmers are barred from accessing these grants due to your department's tardiness. Dollar-for-dollar grants are, as one resident rightly put it, like adding a bandaid to a severed artery. However, it is an insult that they have been announced yet are not available. With no grass, no fodder and dry dams, farmers and the Nationals are screaming for fodder and water cartage subsidies. Rural financial counsellors are being inundated with farmers suffering mental and financial distress. Latrobe LGA farmers are doing it tough and need help. Delaying these grants is doubly punishing farmers. Minister, will you immediately open these grants and provide drought-impacted farmers with relief?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:39): (1642) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Windsor station in my electorate is one of the one-third of Melbourne's railway stations that do not meet Australian standards for independent access by people with disabilities; the station ramps are too steep to comply with modern standards, and there are no lifts to access the platforms. The 2021–22 state budget included funding to design a second entrance to Windsor station at the western end which could potentially provide level access to those who need it. In November 2023 the Department of Transport and Planning confirmed that this design work was complete, but there has not been any word since on when the new entrance will actually be built. Minister, can you advise when passengers at Windsor station in my electorate will be able to use this new entrance?

Western Victoria Region

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (12:40): (1643) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. The Allan Labor government is providing \$152.3 million to increase the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund in the 2025–26 budget. In my electorate I have heard directly from families about the positive impact this has had on kids' participation. Since it has started the program has helped over 2 million students to attend camps, trips, excursions, incursions and more. Minister, how many students in my electorate of Western Victoria Region currently benefit from the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1644) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the 525 bus from Craigieburn station to Donnybrook station. My question is: when will the minister extend the frequency of this bus, extend the route of this bus and also build a few bus shelters? Time and time again I hear from residents in regard to this service: it is too infrequent, it gets stuck in traffic and bus shelters are not built outside of schools, and its infrequency at school times makes it difficult for students. Many in my community and I have dubbed the 525 the 'perimeter express' because, if you look at the suburb of Kalkallo – say it is this big – the bus only goes to about here, so it goes less than a kilometre into the estate that runs almost 3 kilometres. This is not good enough for local residents. People in growth areas deserve the same access to good public transport as everywhere else.

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:42): (1645) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Last month the minister granted Fosterville Gold Mine approval to massively expand its operations. This is despite a range of concerns raised by local community members and environmental organisations. Nearby residents have described damages to their homes and noise all throughout the night, and last November blasting at the mine caused a 3.6-magnitude earthquake. The mine's own environment effects statement revealed the expansion would result in habitat loss for several threatened species, including the swift parrot, and at vulnerable ecosystems such as the Campaspe River, a major catchment located right next to the mine, and there are significant concerns arsenic is being released into it from the mine. Considering that this project has already been given the green light, how will the minister ensure the range of environmental mitigation measures outlined in the assessment of the project will actually be adopted?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (1646) My question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop: Minister, what benefits will the Suburban Rail Loop have for my constituents in Southern Metropolitan Region? With the construction underway on the Suburban Rail Loop, we are closer every day to the delivery of more opportunities and more homes for Victorian families exactly where we need them. Tunnel-boring machines will arrive this year ready to carve out the Suburban

Rail Loop tunnels and will be digging under Melbourne in 2026. The Suburban Rail Loop is truly powering ahead. Major works will create up to 8000 direct jobs, and more than 3000 people are already working on that project. It will reconfigure how Victorians travel around Melbourne, connecting commuters to job precincts, hospitals, universities and more. It is also the largest housing project in Victoria, with 80,000 new homes to be built around these hubs. It has been fantastic to visit several of the station sites with the minister over recent months. I thank the minister for her work and engagement, and I look forward to seeing the benefits it will bring to my community.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:44): (1647) My question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. In 2022 the site of the former Bendigo Teachers' College at 2 Osborne Street, Flora Hill, was announced as an athlete's village of around 160 residents for the March 2026 Commonwealth Games that Labor failed to deliver. Labor then said this project would still go ahead to provide much-needed affordable housing in Bendigo, but it is now mid-June 2025 and the project has not even begun. Minister, why has construction not commenced on the Flora Hill site and when will this project be completed? The La Trobe University 2024–25 annual report confirms that the land was sold to Development Victoria in December 2024. Substantial early investigation works have been completed, and the City of Greater Bendigo considers this a priority site for housing development, including social and affordable housing, and there are well over 3000 families on the social housing waiting register in Bendigo. Minister, you must prioritise the urgent development of this site for families that are desperate to find a place to live.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1648) My question today is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and it relates to the high-rise tower that is being developed in Greensborough above the Savers on Para Road. This housing development has been reported as being made up of more than 200 one- and two-bedroom apartments. It has also been reported that the approval for this apartment tower was fast-tracked by your government without proper community consultation and has even been approved without meeting some of the government's own minimum standards for having decent-sized, livable homes. Residents in my electorate have raised concerns about the lack of larger three- and four-bedroom apartments that would be suitable for families. There is great need in the area for social and affordable housing for families, and it is a huge disappointment that they seemingly have been excluded from this new tower. Minister, how will larger families be able to make use of this new social and affordable housing development, given it has been approved without suitably sized homes?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (1649) My constituency question is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment regarding the Thrive Hubs program, which is building a pipeline of workers for local businesses. Tailored to meet the unique needs of each community, our Thrive Hubs, including the one located in Frankston, collaborate with industry experts, training providers and individuals with lived experience to develop effective employment and educational pathways. It is great to see the Brotherhood of St Laurence showcasing their amazing work in Queens Hall this week, including that of the Thrive Hubs. My question is: how is this program addressing local employment challenges within my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:47): (1650) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding improving the safety, connectivity and management of Taylors Road in the west. Brimbank City Council has long advocated to the state government for funding and support to take management of Taylors Road and to declare the section of the road as an arterial road, bringing it into line with the rest of the carriageway. So I ask: did the minister make representations to the

Treasurer to have Taylors Road between Kings Road and Watervale Boulevard upgraded in this year's budget? The budget handed down on 20 May set aside \$1.2 billion for projects to upgrade roads in growing suburbs, and yet it neglects improving the safety and connectivity of Taylors Road in the west.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1651) My constituent question is for the Minister for Planning in the other place. Kelly and Craig Warren are heroes. Their charity, BK 2 Basics feeds 7000 people every week and also provides clothes. They arrange housing for the homeless and victims of domestic violence. They provide dignity and community for people at a low point in their lives. With generous support of local businesses, they work out of an industrial estate in Narre Warren. Their operation is tidy, and they are considerate neighbours. They also cooperate with other charities, who often refer people to BK 2 Basics. However, Craig and Kelly are not treated like heroes. Because of a complaint, the City of Casey has decided to apply rules to them like they are a retail operation, which they are not. These rules will eventually make it impossible for them to operate. This has the potential to devastate thousands of people. My question to the minister is: will you consider granting an exemption to the zoning requirements to allow BK 2 Basics to feed and clothe the disadvantaged people of south-east Melbourne?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:49): (1652) My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. Two weekends ago a young kid, Jack, was bashed senselessly in Pakenham while he was at a party. Not only was he unconscious but he was also dragged, and he sustained some pretty serious injuries, including a broken eye socket requiring surgery. My question is: we have been waiting in Pakenham for a hospital that was meant to be started in 2018 and finished last year. We have not got that, and now we cannot get an ambulance service. Jack waited 2 hours for an ambulance that never arrived. In the end his dad came, picked him up and took him to the hospital. We have not got a hospital in Pakenham, we cannot get an ambulance in Pakenham, so my question is: why has the minister completely abandoned the people of the Pakenham electorate?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:50): (1653) My constituency question to the Minister for Planning concerns the proposed Acciona Tall Tree Wind Farm in Golden Plains shire. I attended a rally last year and heard serious concerns from residents of Meredith, Lethbridge, Inverleigh, Teesdale and Bannockburn about the project's scale and siting. These include shadow flicker, visual amenity, wildlife impacts, land use restrictions, transmission infrastructure and disruption during construction and operation. My particular concern is for the Lethbridge Airport. While some turbine heights have been reduced, 54 turbines may remain dangerously close to runways and training zones. Acciona has referenced an aviation safety study, yet no such assessment has been shared with the airport, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner or the community. CASA confirms it has received no impact statement. Will the minister (1) refer the project for a full environment effects statement, (2) require a comprehensive aviation safety study, and (3) ensure that a report is made public before any approval is granted?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:51): (1654) I have spoken with many residents who have raised concerns about the lack of affordable housing in Northern Victoria, especially in Bendigo and Swan Hill. Caravan and Residential Parks Victoria have released a document focused on residential land lease communities, or RLLCs, to help address the need for affordable housing in Victoria for people over 55. Supporting their development, particularly in peri-urban and regional Victoria, is an important step in increasing affordable housing supply quickly, freeing up home owner capital and allowing ageing in place. I know residents in Kangaroo Flat and Marong who reside in land lease communities. For many, they provide a right-sized new home in a safe, low-maintenance, high-quality

environment. Regrettably, Victoria lags behind both New South Wales and Queensland in their development, and I ask the Minister for Housing and Building to review their recommendations and meet with Caravan and Residential Parks Victoria to help address the need for more affordable housing.

Sitting suspended 12:52 pm until 2:02 pm.

Motions

Drought

Debate resumed.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): I rise to continue my contribution on what is an important motion that has been brought before us today by Mrs Tyrrell. In fact Mrs Tyrrell, Dr Heath and I have just run into the chamber from an event over the lunchbreak – a very, very valuable event it was as well. I do wish to continue my remarks on what we are here to discuss today – the motion on drought relief – and I will reiterate the importance of the supports which have already been announced. As I touched on earlier, we have seen \$37.7 million committed to the on-farm drought infrastructure grant program, ensuring that farmers right across the state will be able to access those grants of up to \$5000 to support those long-term security improvements that will help to make their farms all the more resilient.

I will briefly deviate to comment and welcome Minister Tierney's remarks in her ministers statement during question time, with her very strong stance on water buybacks. I note the former water minister in the chamber was also passionate in speaking up for our regional Victorian communities on this issue. We know that whilst the preservation of our environment, indeed the downstream environment, is very important, Victoria has already done what I would say its fair share, but it is probably fair to say much more than its fair share, in these projects, whether it is for the broader system or whether it is for those projects in Victoria. If you look at the projects we have done to preserve the water in the systems in the Goulburn or the Ovens, which have a river, or the Murray itself, Victoria has already done more than perhaps any other state in the Murray–Darling Basin by some measure.

I am very glad that our government has been steadfastly resolute under both the former minister and the current minister. The new minister in fact reiterated at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that there is absolutely no support for water buybacks under this state Labor government, because we know the impact that it can have on our farming communities and on the broader regional economies in centres. And indeed – I probably do not need to say this to Mrs Tyrrell – in communities like hers where she lives, the impact that it has is not just on the farmers themselves, it is on everything. Speaking as someone who has relatives – relatively speaking from Melbourne – not too far away, but a fair distance from Mrs Tyrrell still, who were for a time farming and are now doing other things in one of our very important regional communities in the north, I have seen from their perspective the importance of one small thing and how it can have such a profound impact, and in those regional communities especially so. It was very good and I was very heartened to hear the strong words of Minister Tierney today in opposing those buybacks but also in taking that up to the Commonwealth and being very clear with Victoria's position.

There have been a number of statewide improvements, whether it has been to irrigation channels or other measures, over the years. Again, those all lead to that work that I was mentioning that has put Victoria at the forefront of saving and supporting and securing those precious water resources. It was Mr Bourman in his contribution who spoke of the famous lines from the poem, we are a land 'of droughts and flooding rains', and it is the cruellest of cruel ironies that while so many in our state have been suffering through drought, we have seen parts of the country just one state to our north experiencing record floodwaters. The works such as supporting those irrigation channels, whether it is those major pieces of investment that have been undertaken in this state or whether it is the smaller scale projects too, such as the on-farm drought infrastructure grants, they all play a role in preserving

that resource, because some years it is all too abundant and other years it is far too scarce. That is why measures such as this are important not just for supporting our farmers in the interim and in the current situation but for protecting those resources and giving that bit of extra stability and support for our farmers into the future.

But there are other measures as well that that need to be taken and that in many cases already are being taken, because for all the value and the very significant importance that these grants will have, they do not of course make it rain more right now and you cannot build a retrospective bit of infrastructure on your property. But what we have seen is there are a number of other supports as well. I note some colleagues have already discussed some of the significant mental health supports that have been extended and rolled out in place. Again I note the importance of us dealing with those questions respectfully and not in a way that is in any way trying to inflame or otherwise misrepresent a situation. It is very important that when we are speaking of these things in communities that are so often stoic and reserved and proud – and rightly proud – we are ensuring that wherever we can, we provide those mental health supports. And for all that we can do, so much of that needs to come from each other and looking out for each other. There are many other things I would like to talk to you about, but I believe my time is about to or has expired. I will leave my remarks there.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:09): I also rise to give my full support to motion 971 in Mrs Tyrrell's name, and I really thank her for bringing it. Victoria is currently facing some of the worst drought conditions in decades, and we are facing some of the lowest rainfall totals on record. Many farmers have told me that they just did not see this coming. The information they were given by the Bureau of Meteorology was just not adequate, and they were really caught off guard and unable to plan, and there are a lot of government regulations that have not allowed them to do what they need to do with water on their own land. The stress and the pressure that they are under is just enormous. Many farmers across Gippsland are out of water and hundreds more are close to it. Recent rainfall, they tell me, is helping their wellbeing and mental health, but there is a very, very long way to go before empty dams are full and before farmers will not have to spend their whole day carting water into their farm or across to different areas of their farm. They are facing just terrible situations where they have to make really difficult decisions when it comes to their livestock. Farmers are exhausted, and there is a lot of additional work that is going on at the moment. Fodder is extremely hard to get, and the price is through the roof just because of how scarce it is. We do urgently need subsidies for water and crops and livestock, relief from energy costs, help transporting water and fodder, rate relief and mental health support.

I want to refer to an email I got from somebody from GippsDairy just last week who says that:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

At least 120 farms that we are connected to are extremely concerned about the dry conditions, and for every one of those there would be a couple more who have not reached out because they are struggling.

She said:

I would be comfortable saying that for every farmer we have seen, there is one more that we have not, so you can safely double the numbers that I have just quoted and that will give you a good indication of farmers that are under extreme pressure.

Feedback from farmers from different events that have been held – one that I attended in Inverloch and another in Drouin – is that these are some of the things that they are really seeking help on: support for cow parking, which is having available farms with water and fodder host cows for a period of time; lists of contractors who can help with digging dams, carting water and drilling bores; and available water supply points as close as possible to each farm that is out of water. They also ask for mental health support, for help in finding fodder availability; weekly updates from the Bureau of Meteorology; events to help farmers keep connected and access to farm household allowances, because there are too many barriers to accessing this.

Long-range weather forecasts at the moment are not offering farmers any help or much reprieve, and we need to be able to figure out how it is we can get through this next period. I spoke last week about when I was at a meeting a few weeks ago with a farmer – actually 65 farmers, but one of the farmers said, ‘If we do not get significant rainfall I just do not know what will happen to us.’

I do want to speak in the last 2 minutes that I have left on the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund. This has been absolutely detrimental to the mental health and wellbeing of farmers. A few people on this side of the chamber and the crossbench have raised it and have been accused of politicising an issue by the other side. There has been all sorts of shouting and saying that we are politicising an issue. I want to say that we absolutely are not politicising issues by giving farmers a voice. Our job in here is to give the communities that we represent a voice, and this has been something that has been catastrophic to their mental health and their forward planning. Everyone is thankful that they are not going to have to look at this for another year, but it needs to be scrapped altogether, because this is something that the farmers and the people that really are the lifeblood of our community have hanging over their heads, they are so stressed about it and they really need significant help. Thank you, Rikkie-Lee, for bringing this motion to the house. I strongly support it.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) incorporated the following:

The Greens are happy to stand in support of this motion today. While it was only a few weeks ago that I spoke to Mrs McArthur’s motion on the drought facing Western Victoria, and I have previously spoken about the drought that has been affecting that region for 18 months now, the reality for farmers across this state is of increasing concern. And so it’s essential that this issue is brought to Spring St whenever possible. I commend Mrs Tyrrell for introducing this motion today.

Last week may have brought some rain to rural communities, and with it some relief, but the future remains uncertain for many. That’s because it’s becoming increasingly obvious that the frequency and intensity of these dry periods are growing.

The latest *State of the Climate* report from the CSIRO confirmed what is already obvious to many – that Australia’s climate continues to warm. This warming has led to an increase in extreme heat events over land and in our oceans, meaning that while in some parts of Australia like the east coast, intense rainfall events are increasing, in most the average annual rainfall is decreasing bringing with it more frequent and prolonged drought. In fact the drying trend currently being observed in southern Australia is the most sustained large-scale change in rainfall since the late 1880s.

For people on the ground, for our primary producers, our farmers, less predictable rainfall invariably means less certainty about crop yield, less certainty about daily on-farm costs and inevitably, less certainty about income and financial security.

But it’s not only the bank accounts of our farmers that are insecure. When farmers produce less year on year there are significant questions to be asked about our food security more broadly.

At present our food supply chain is incredibly vulnerable to unforeseen shocks and stressors. In 2023 the Climate Council estimated that there was less than five days of perishable food in the supply chain at any one time.

And yet Victoria’s food system is no stranger to disruptive shocks. In 2022 high rainfall and flooding decimated many summer crops and food prices spiked as a result. Now with drought conditions extending for over 12 months, meat prices are set to increase and broadacre crops such as wheat are at risk of failure.

This places significant strain on farming communities but the strain can also be felt across Victoria. More and more Victorians are struggling to afford food. They’re being forced to skip meals, to go without fresh food, and raid their savings just to pay for essentials.

It is therefore absolutely critical for all Victorians that the government implements a holistic strategy to secure our food supply.

While there are some things that individual consumers can do to support the supply chain, like shopping local and in season, what is needed now more than ever is whole-of-government leadership to ensure the security of our food systems for decades to come, and with a particular focus on the impacts of climate change.

This could include having systems in place to implement hardship funding, such as that provided by the then Premier Daniel Andrews in 2019 and being advocated for by Mrs Tyrrell again today. This is important to keep our farming communities going through tough times.

It could also look like securing our green wedges on the urban fringe, such as the highly productive and important Werribee green wedge, and investing in small-scale regional and urban farming, something that is much more common in European countries but seen as somewhat boutique here, so that we have a diversity in this state when it comes to where we are getting our food from.

My heart goes out to all rural communities in this time of uncertainty and drought, and I implore the government to do more to proactively support our food system, especially the people who grow it.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (14:14): First, I would like to thank my colleagues for their contributions today. Before I close I want to return to the simple truth that has guided this motion from the start: this is about people – real people – not statistics, not sectors, but families who are barely holding on through the worst drought conditions in decades. We cannot ignore their pain, their exhaustion or the generational scars drought leaves behind, as I have personally experienced, and we must not delay. Relief must be real, it must be immediate, and it must reflect the urgency of what our farming communities are facing today. I ask this house once more to stand with our farmers, support this motion and let us show all Victorians, especially those in the regions, that we are here for them when it matters most.

Motion agreed to.

Health services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:15): I rise to speak to the motion that I am moving today. It is an important motion, and I would hope that all members in the house understand the seriousness of what is going to be debated this afternoon and what this motion goes to the heart of. As my motion states, it is highlighting what was exposed just a few days ago on 11 June, which has been in the headlines, around transfer of patients from ambulance trolleys into the Northern Hospital's emergency department and the manipulation of the data that is entered. This is fraudulent and it is fake, and it is very serious. I move:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the fraudulent activity conducted by the Northern Hospital emergency department;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) staff have routinely falsified data relating to the time patients spend waiting to be offloaded from an ambulance into the hospital's emergency department;
 - (b) data has been falsified to meet strict statewide targets for ambulances to transfer 90 per cent of patients to hospital staff within 40 minutes;
 - (c) ambulance offload times have been altered by up to an hour;
 - (d) manipulation of this data is reported to have been happening since 2017 and is widespread and known to management;
 - (e) the falsification and manipulation of recording data has extremely serious implications for the integrity of data and public confidence in Victoria's health system; and
- (3) calls on the Allan Labor government to appoint an external and independent health expert to review processes relating to the collection of data on ambulance transfer times in public health emergency departments, as required for reporting to the Department of Health and the Victorian Agency for Health Information.

I make those points because when this issue was raised with me I raised my concerns at the time. As I said, this is fraudulent activity. We had just gone through the budgetary process. We were just going through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process where a lot of this information that is required by government to look at funding requirements for hospitals is having to be met. We know from last year, when the minister and the former department secretary wrote to health services and clearly stipulated that there would be massive cuts to health and then the Premier had to come along and get a Treasurer's advance of \$1.5 billion to prop up what was going to be cut, that hospitals are under enormous pressure. The falsification of this data to meet some of those strict reporting requirements by government to get their funding and be able to meet those targets I think is serious, but more so, what is very serious is the confidence in the system.

There is no denying and there is no hiding that Victoria's health system is in a complete mess. It is in crisis. And it is no fault of those people that work within the system. This is years of government decisions and mismanagement, and now we have got huge implications around budget constraints with a whole range of areas. The government will argue they are putting in more money than ever before. But we have got an ageing population, and we have got an increased population, and for years they have not met the needs of the community and let it fall by the wayside. As a result we have got huge numbers of people waiting on the elective surgery waitlist. Through COVID I warned that if you shut down surgery and shut down hospitals, shut down vital cancer screening and shut down preventative health measures, those issues around the delivery of primary care to support patients in the community, you are going to get worse health outcomes. People are going to get sicker, and they are going to need more acute care.

All of that is occurring. It is exactly what is happening. The people did get sicker, they missed their diagnoses and they are requiring acute care. Of course our ambulance system is in a complete mess as well. We have had a revolving door of CEOs and management that is just all over the place. Look at the appalling patient outcomes: just a few days ago there was the tragic death of the man in Blackburn who needed an ambulance after he had a fall, was bleeding and no ambulance turned up. He called 000 not once but twice – no ambulance turned up. This is in the heart of Melbourne. When the paramedics finally arrived to find this shocking situation, the poor man had died. That is just unforgivable in 2025, and that just shows the extent of the system from one end to the other. You have got chaos within the acute system. You have got so many issues, whether it is patients waiting days to get a basic MRI or whether it is hospital ramping because they cannot get the patients through the emergency departments. And then to meet those targets there, the staff are for whatever reason undertaking this manipulation of data. I think it is terribly concerning. Then on the other hand, you have got the poor man that needed an ambulance and could not get one because they were ramped. The whole situation is quite frankly dreadful.

That is why I have said that it needs to be an independent investigation, because basically what you have got now is the former CEO of Northern Hospital running Hospitals Victoria within the Department of Health. You have got the CEO from Northern Hospital now reporting to the Department of Health, reporting on themselves. The government are looking at themselves – they are investigating themselves. That is not good enough. That is not going to instil confidence in the Victorian public about what is happening. Why is this data being manipulated? Is it happening in other emergency departments? I had a conversation today where a doctor told me that, yes, it is widespread. They told me that today.

I wrote to the Auditor-General on 11 June, straight after this story was reported, because it does need to be looked at by the Auditor-General. They need to do a proper audit, looking at what is happening with this data that is attached to government funding. All of this has a massive impact on the way the budget is framed, the way the government sell the budget, the way the government sells their data – their quarterly data, the Victorian Agency for Health Information data that they put out. The government sells this. The minister was saying the day before this story broke that they had record response times in ambulance callouts – they are completely fudged. These figures are all fudged. No-one should believe what this government says around hospital data. Whether it is hospital data, emergency department data, whether it is Ambulance Victoria data, no-one should believe this government, because as we have seen with this fraud, this manipulation of data, it is not correct. Sometimes the data is being manipulated a day after. It is recorded. I have actually seen the documents where it comes in, saying the date, the time, and then it is crossed out and re-entered by somebody else. I have seen it. It is clear that manipulation of the data has occurred.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: I do not think Mr Batchelor believes what I am saying. But I can tell you now, these people know what they have seen and what they have provided. I would say you should back this motion, Mr Batchelor. Your government, if it had any integrity, would back this motion,

because we do not need the government investigating itself. The Department of Health has ballsed up so much – and we have got a revolving door of people going through that too – whether it is through COVID, whether it is this issue, whether it is a whole range of things like the budgets. The former department secretary is writing to health services saying, ‘This is what you’re funding. There will be no entering into any agreement.’ I am paraphrasing, but it is basically ‘You won’t be getting anything else,’ and the minister following with a letter.

They have completely ripped the guts out of Victoria’s health system. You can say whatever you like, but what the minister said about ambulance response times being the lowest on record is wrong. This data being reported to the department is wrong. And that is why I say somebody outside the department who has got some credibility needs to go through and do this, to make sure the correct data is reported to the department and then reported to VAHI, the Victorian Agency for Health Information, whose report is released quarterly and gives a snapshot of what is going on and provides that information to the Victorian public. And where agencies and all these people go around and say, ‘No, everything’s fine’ – it is not fine. It is not fine when a man rings 000 twice in Blackburn in the heart of Melbourne and no ambulance turns up for 5 hours, and sadly, he is found to have died. That is not fine.

Evan Mulholland: Spending money on SRL.

Georgie CROZIER: This is not fine. When the manipulation of data is being undertaken to make the transfer times from ambulances into emergency departments look better than they actually are, that is not fine. That is wrong. We must get to the bottom of what is happening within our health system. We must have some proper accountability, some true transparency. And I say the whole system needs to be reviewed, because doing it piecemeal and with the fragmentation and the networks that are being set up there is just no focus on getting this right. As Mr Mulholland interjected to me a couple of minutes ago, their focus is on the Suburban Rail Loop, and it is tens of billions of dollars going into that, without looking at these issues. Is there an issue with that funding parcel that is provided to Northern Health? Why are they manipulating this data to make it look better than it is? Is there so much pressure in the system that they need to do that so it gets ticked off and the government provides the required funding?

Let us not forget what the minister said. She said that there would be consequences. I really do not know what those consequences are. I mean, it is all talk. I am reading from the report of 11 June:

Health minister Mary-Anne Thomas threatened hospitals with “consequences” if they failed to meet the tough new standards that were based on changes made at the Austin Hospital which saw a drastic improvement in transfer times.

So that is the threat that is there for these hospitals to therefore go ahead and manipulate the data, because the minister has threatened the hospitals with consequences. I say, Minister: what about the patient outcomes? What about those staff that are trying to do their best to get those patients off the trolleys into the emergency departments, into the acute beds, into getting the treatment that they need? Because when the hospital is ramped, the poor man in Blackburn who died because no ambulance was available just demonstrates the complete and utter mess and chaos that the system is in. It is utterly devastating to think that in Victoria in 2025 this is occurring, where we have fake data and fraudulent activity occurring to meet demands because the threats of funding cuts are there. And they were there – let us not forget those letters from the minister and the former department secretary just a little over 12 months ago. They had to be corrected, because people were going to die. Hospital executives said that in a leaked tape – said it. ICU beds would be shut down, neonatal units would be shut down, dialysis chairs would be reduced – a whole range of things. And we saw cuts to the cancer sector and a whole range of other cuts that occurred in that last budget, and we are still seeing them.

This government has not managed health at all well. It beggars belief how terribly bad some of the outcomes are. Clinicians speak to me all the time. They are really struggling in many instances, and they are doing their very, very best. They have been extraordinary over many years in what they are trying to provide to their patients. I think they deserve better than what this government is offering

them. I think they deserve to understand the true extent, the true nature, of the issues, so that you can actually address them. Papering over them, covering up, saying things that are not true like, ‘We’ve got the best ambulance response times on record,’ which is blatantly not true – it is not true. They are continuing to be the worst on record, the response times, not as the minister says. It is just incredible that we have to be discussing this. That is why I say that I am hoping that the Auditor-General will take up my request to look at what I have written to him about, to look at this – the falsification of the hospital records and the manipulation of this data – because there does need to be greater transparency. There needs to be trust in the system. There should not need to be whistleblowers coming out and saying, ‘You need to know what’s going on. This is what is happening. This is wrong.’

I say to those people that speak to me and others thank you, because you are exposing what is happening. You are telling Victorians exactly what is happening. Without that information we cannot improve the system. It is papered over. It is sold by the government that everything is fantastic. It is not. It is not when we have got tens of thousands of Victorians still waiting on a waitlist to get their surgery and tens of thousands of others trying to get onto that waitlist to get their surgery, when the dispatch system, the 000 system, is still not working after years of promises by government that they would fix it.

I say again: when you have got these scenarios, this manipulation and the level of fraud going on, and when I have been told today by others, ‘It’s more widespread than you think. It’s happening in other emergency departments’, then for goodness sake, an investigation by the department into Northern Health – talking to themselves – is not going to get to the extent of that. That is the letter to the Auditor-General I have done, but it needs a deeper review, and that is why I ask that members support this important motion.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:33): I rise to speak on Ms Crozier’s motion, where she seems to, in the terms of the motion, have prejudged the findings of an inquiry that she has called for. In her contribution today she did not made reference to allegations; she made reference to facts, and she has categorically stated that she knows these things are true. As yet she has not provided anything other than references to a *Herald Sun* article. They are serious and troubling, but to go from anonymous allegations in a newspaper to motions in the Parliament and treat them as absolute fact and evidence of fraud is a big step. I just thought I would point that out at the beginning of this contribution – that they are serious matters and we should treat them seriously, and that is what the government is doing. Ms Crozier has both in the terms of this motion called for an independent expert to review the collection of data and has also referred the matter to the Auditor-General.

The Auditor-General in this state is an independent officer of the Parliament and has the power to make decisions on the audits that they will undertake. It is not my practice to place pressure on an independent officer of the Parliament who is seeking to exercise the performance of their duties. I expect that the Auditor-General will make their own determination in due course about these matters that are before them and act appropriately. I have absolute confidence that that will be done, just as I have confidence that given the seriousness of these allegations – again, anonymous allegations that were made on the front page of the newspaper which Ms Crozier has taken to be determinative of fraud and has made pretty sweeping allegations of falsification of material by staff – what we have done as a government in response is take them seriously. The government has commissioned an external audit of the data reporting to ensure their robustness. In addition, Northern Health in particular, to look at these particular allegations, has engaged an independent audit. We are taking them seriously, and this is on top of the regular data integrity assurance work that the department and the agency for health information undertake.

Performance data is important to our system. It helps us collectively to understand the extent to which the services that we fund are meeting the needs of the community, and it must be a robust system. That is why this government did things like reintroduce the reporting of ambulance response times, and the reason we had to do that was because when the Liberals were last in power and Mr Davis was the Minister for Health, he stopped it. The Liberal Party’s track record on these matters is to stop the

publication of independent data from which we can make assessments about the performance of our systems. Labor's track record is to reintroduce reporting and make that data public. That is what we have done and that is what we will continue to do. We have assurance mechanisms in place. There has been an independent audit put in place by the Northern Hospital, and the health department has engaged an external process. Again, there is consideration before the Auditor-General about these practices.

I think what Ms Crozier is trying to do is to cause increased concern and fear in the community about our health system here in Victoria. We know that there are a lot of pressures on our health system here in Victoria. We see the demand that is appearing before our emergency departments, which are facing unprecedented demand – more than 2 million presentations in the last year. And we see the pressure on our ambulance system. These pressures are not unique to the Victorian context; these sorts of pressures have been felt nationally and in other parts of the world as well.

I did want to take the opportunity to thank the staff who are tirelessly working in our hospitals to treat the patients who turn up at emergency departments, to thank our paramedics and ambulance staff who are tirelessly working to make sure they can respond to calls appropriately and quickly as is required, because they do an amazing job. I do not think we should be making sweeping accusations that they are doctoring figures unless we have that. I am just worried and a bit concerned that, with some of the comments that were made, Ms Crozier was casting a pretty wide net by saying there is some sort of widespread –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ms Crozier is seeking to cast exceptionally wide aspersions on our hardworking healthcare professionals – the nurses and the doctors. What we want to see and what Ms Crozier has the opportunity to do is actually present some evidence of that rather than interject across the chamber that she has had a phone call from someone an hour ago.

I think it is important that we do actually have underway a pretty significant piece of work looking at, in particular, the pressures on our ambulance system and the performance of Ambulance Victoria. Indeed the Legal and Social Issues Committee of this chamber has been tasked with looking at issues associated with the ambulance system here in Victoria. We have had two days of hearings, including one full day of public hearings, and we have got more to come. Again if we want to see where we are doing some detailed examinations of the issues that are confronting our ambulance system, the Parliament is doing its job. The Legal and Social Issues Committee is doing its job. The Parliament is doing its job, and we have got an inquiry underway that is looking at the pressures that are facing our ambulance system. Again, as a member of that committee, I am not going to presuppose any of the deliberations or discussions or recommendations that might arise during the course of that inquiry. What I can say is that the public evidence that we have received so far shows that our paramedics are working exceptionally hard. They are trying to do their best in challenging circumstances, because of demand, to deliver the services that Victoria needs.

The other thing I will say just in closing is that we know that there are significant pressures on our system and we know that our frontline healthcare professionals are working exceptionally hard to support them, and we are supporting those staff. We are backing in our frontline healthcare staff with additional funding. You would have seen an extra \$11.1 billion for our healthcare system in the budget that was handed down just a few weeks ago. This year alone \$31 billion is going into our health system, the biggest ever investment in frontline care, including a record \$9.3 billion this year for our hospitals. This funding is supporting our hospitals to have the resources they need in the places that they need them the most. On top of that, we are building more hospitals: Frankston, Footscray, you see them coming out of the ground, soon to be open and operationalised with additional staff. I was at Sandringham Hospital just the other day seeing the \$5 million investment that we have made with the health minister upgrading the outpatient clinics at Sandringham Hospital. There are significant

investments being made in health care in this state. These allegations the government is taking seriously. What we are not going to do is join with Crozier in making political games with them.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:43): I thank Ms Crozier for bringing this motion today. However, we will not be supporting it, not because we do not share concerns about the seriousness of these allegations but because we do not feel particularly comfortable targeting an individual department in an individual hospital based on some very limited public information, largely out of concerns for the staff involved in that department. I am also aware that there is already an independent audit that has been organised by the Northern Hospital to look into this issue; the department has their own. I understand and commend Ms Crozier on writing to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office to look into this issue, and I think the Auditor-General is very well placed to look at this matter. I will be interested to see what comes from that.

There is also, as Mr Batchelor said, an inquiry into Ambulance Victoria currently taking place, and without pre-empting the findings of that, I really hope that that will go some of the way to addressing some of the problems that have been highlighted through this motion with our ambulance system. But it is worth noting that delays with ambulance offloading are not a new problem and they are not confined to Victoria. It is certainly something that is getting worse, and we can actually expect this trend to continue if we do not fundamentally change the whole system. It is not just the ambulance service we need to focus on, it is not just emergency departments, it is the whole healthcare system.

The consequences of ambulance ramping are well known, the worst of which are tragic cases. We have heard some more today about people who have called an ambulance and become incredibly unwell or even died as a result of waiting too long. There was the recent coroner's report into the death of a young woman who waited more than 7 hours for an ambulance. This provides a stark illustration of the problem. Apparently on that night more than 80 per cent of Ambulance Victoria's fleet was ramped – not to mention the impacts that ramping has on paramedic morale and the general inefficiency within the health system that it creates. But simply setting more performance targets based on how quickly a patient is transferred off that ambulance trolley will not help.

We hear outrage about alleged so-called data manipulation or workarounds that patch over a problem to make it look like hospitals are meeting targets, but anyone who has ever worked anywhere near an emergency department will not be surprised. Emergency departments are at the pointy end of the hospital system. It is where waiting times are obvious, and this is where the bad headlines come from. Governments do not like it. These are bad headlines – you do not want people waiting for hours or bad things happening. Governments do not like the bad headlines, and they need to look like they are cracking down on it, so if you set some time-based performance targets that look like you are being really tough on the hospitals, setting high expectations about how quickly people move through that system, I can see the appeal of that – it makes sense that they do that – but it supposes that emergency departments are somehow not already pretty well incentivised to move people through quickly. It is as though the staff are sitting around having cups of tea, watching reruns of *Scrubs*, thinking about when they might get to the next patient. That is not the reality. There are genuinely – and I have been there – natural incentives to try and clear that waiting room. You do not want people sitting around, not least because of the empathy that you have for the people who have been sitting there for hours waiting to be seen. The reason this happens is not because emergency departments are not working fast enough, it is because of the rest of the health system.

A lot is made of low-acuity patients, people who come to ED with minor issues. They are sometimes labelled GP problems, which is a bugbear of mine but I will leave that one. They are generally not taking up a bed; they just wait for a very long time. The problem lies with people who need a bed but cannot be moved to their next destination. Sometimes it is because there isn't non-urgent transport available to take someone back to an aged care facility, so they wait in the emergency department for hours. Very commonly it is because there isn't an inpatient bed. The wards are full. Why are the wards full? Because people are not being discharged. Why aren't they being discharged? Because sometimes junior medical staff are waiting to do a ward round on a weekend and there are no senior medical staff

available to make a decision about whether that person should be discharged. It depends on how often that senior medical staff does a round, often not on weekends, so maybe there is a day or two delay there. Maybe there is no allied health available to do an assessment on someone to see if they are safe to go home or to provide an assessment of their home to see if it is safe for them to return to. Maybe there is no bed in the subacute rehabilitation facility or an aged care placement or adequate in-home supports in place for someone.

Governments can set all the targets they like, but until they address the fundamental causes of bed block in the rest of the hospital, it will not make any difference. What it will do, however, is create perverse incentives to find ways around the targets. For example, it will lead to things like temporary so-called wards where patients are shuffled so the timer can be stopped but making no genuine difference to the outcomes or care for that patient. Targets in health care are important, but as I have said before in this place, they should be related to patient outcomes, otherwise it just drives behaviours that are about meeting the target even if this means a workaround or potentially even gaming of the system.

This is an issue this Parliament has looked at before, and I remembered while I was looking at the motion that I presented evidence myself at a parliamentary inquiry in 2009 undertaken by the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration. They conducted an inquiry into public hospital performance data, and the whole focus was data manipulation and this issue, the same issue – nothing has changed. It is just the same thing. I was sitting on the other side of the table, and Mr Davis asked me lots of questions. I do not think they were actually related to the subject of the inquiry, but I remember giving evidence to that inquiry. It was a really important one at the time. A whole lot of recommendations were made, and I am not sure that the fundamentals have shifted.

Some improvements can be made around internal hospital efficiency and movement of people through the system, but that is not going to be enough to stop the lines of ambulances banked up at hospitals that are now all too familiar when you drive past. Fixing hospital bed block, by and large, means focusing on what happens outside of the hospital. Foremost, as I have said countless times, it means investing significantly in preventative and community-based care. It means things like funding public dental, providing better pathways in public mental health care, providing improved chronic disease management and stopping people needing to go to the hospital in the first place. If you invest in primary care, in preventative care, you have less demand on the acute hospital system. It also means investing in subacute care, like our rehabilitation systems and facilities, so that people can move out of that acute hospital bed to somewhere where it makes sense for them to spend more time.

We need more investment in allied health care. They play such a critical role in our hospital system and are key to moving people through that system, but we completely underinvest in that. We need Hospital in the Home programs, we need community-based mental health care, you name it. All of those things outside the hospital are where you are going to see the biggest improvements, and that is what will cure the problem of ambulance ramping that we see. Fundamentally it means focusing on patient outcomes, not just some arbitrary time-based targets in an attempt to avoid headlines. Until that happens, I can guarantee government can set all the targets they like, and they either will not be met, or if they are, we will barely have to scratch the surface to see that there has been some sort of workaround to tick the box.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:52): I rise today fully in support of Ms Crozier's motion. It is an excellent motion and one I want to speak to because it affects my electorate. Anything that affects the Northern Hospital, I take a great interest in. What we saw with the allegedly routinely falsified data relating to the time patients spent waiting to be off-loaded from an ambulance at the hospital's emergency department goes to the core of the issues that we are facing in our healthcare system at the moment. It is a matter of public integrity. It is a matter of transparency and accountability in our public health system. This is fraudulent activity going on at the Northern Hospital emergency department. It is deeply alarming. I think the subsequent response has been

symbolic of an addiction to spin and cover up that will define this government when the history books are written.

Ms Crozier's motion sets out serious concerns held by the Liberals and Nationals, backed by credible reports and frontline testimonials, regarding the falsification of ambulance off-load data. The people of Victoria have every right to expect the health data used to make life-and-death decisions is accurate. Anything less is a betrayal of trust. The motion notes that staff at the Northern Hospital emergency department have routinely falsified data related to ambulance off-load times. This is not an isolated or accidental error. Let me make that clear. This is not isolated and not accidental, so we need to get to the bottom of who knew what and when. Are there people, for example, within the Department of Health who knew about this, who do know about this? The so-called 'external people' to Northern Health in the department – have they had previous associations with Northern Health? Do they know people in Northern Health that would put them at a conflict of interest? These are the kind of questions that need to be answered by subsequent government spinners – sorry, speakers. It could be both. These are the kind of questions that need to be answered, because it raises troubling questions about the culture of compliance and integrity within the hospital's administration, and it makes me wonder what pressure has been coming from this government to do so.

You have got the Northern Hospital in Epping – we really need to be in the planning stages or the construction phases of a hospital further north around Donnybrook or Kalkallo, where we are meant to be having a city the size of Canberra and no hospital has been promised or earmarked by this government in that region. We have got our outer suburbs growing enormously, and it is putting all this pressure on the Northern Hospital. No wonder things like this occur with all the pressure that is happening at Northern Hospital.

We see time after time the pressure on our public hospital system, and it was thanks to Ms Crozier and really the community last year that the government were forced to bail out a lot of our hospitals. They are continuing to apply financial pressure on our hospitals to meet efficiency targets and meet productivity targets, because they have blown the budget elsewhere. They have blown the budget elsewhere with \$48 billion of blowouts. They have blown the budget elsewhere, heading to over \$190 billion of debt, of which we are going to be paying over \$25 million a day – over \$1 million an hour; that is almost eclipsing the entire spend of the Department of Education – just in servicing the interest on the debt, not paying it down. And it is growing as a proportion of government spending; it will probably end up overtaking our health spend.

These are the consequences when you cannot manage money. Victorians pay the price, and we saw, as Ms Crozier mentioned, a Blackburn man who called 000 twice and could not get an ambulance because ambulances were ramped, and unfortunately that man died – a horrible and preventable tragedy. But sure, let us go spend billions more on a rail tunnel from Cheltenham to Box Hill. That will fix our health crisis. Let us keep tightening the screws on our public health system in Victoria, putting more pressure on the Northern Hospital, Box Hill Hospital, Maroondah Hospital and other hospitals and spend billions of dollars – \$30 billion to \$34 billion, probably \$50 billion in reality – on one train tunnel in the eastern suburbs. What is that going to do? And has the government modelled the pressure on the health system from the supposed 70,000 new people that are going to go into those suburbs? No, of course they have not – of course they have not.

Good government is about choices. Consistently we are witnessing this government making all the wrong choices, and it is Victorians that are currently paying the price. They are paying the price in a ramped ambulance. They are paying the price in not being able to get an ambulance. They are paying the price because we have got a government who said, 'Look, all of our data is okay; all of our data is fine' –

Georgie Crozier: 'Trust us.'

Evan MULHOLLAND: ‘Trust us,’ when it is not. You cannot describe our health system at the moment as fine. These are the consequences of a government that cannot manage money, that wastes money – \$48 billion of blowouts on major projects, a huge amount. Over \$190 billion of debt –

Sonja Terpstra: You’re making it up.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I am not making that up. Check the budget papers, Ms Terpstra. I will take the interjection – check the budget papers. If you break that down, it is \$25 million a day, over \$1 million an hour, just to service the interest on the debt. And while unfortunately you have mismanaged money by that much, it is Victorians that pay for that, and there is no better example of that than the Craigieburn community hospital. I mean, this was promised by Labor two elections ago, the Craigieburn community hospital, and it is finished but it remains behind a padlocked fence, with no doctors, no nurses and no beds. It is not open at all. It is like the pub with no beer. Hume City Council have put in a notice of motion seeking clarification from the minister on its opening – they cannot provide it to us. Supposedly it may be operational in late 2026. So you have got this ridiculous situation where people drive past on Craigieburn Road a brand new community hospital that the government has run out of money to actually fund and operationalise – fund with doctors, staff with nurses and put beds in – so people can get appropriate care that can take pressure off the Northern Hospital. But this is the consequence when Labor cannot manage money. It is Victorians in places like Craigieburn and Greenvale that pay the price, because they cannot manage money and they divert resources away elsewhere. And the people of Craigieburn know when they look at that brand new community hospital behind a barbed wire fence that this government made a choice and this government chose a rail tunnel – a \$34 billion rail tunnel in the eastern suburbs – over them, and it is a disgrace,

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:01): I rise to make a contribution on this motion brought by Ms Crozier on ambulance and ED performance. I had the benefit of listening to Mr Batchelor’s contribution and also Dr Mansfield’s contribution, and I want to touch on a couple of comments made by each of those speakers. But in effect this motion really is based on a *Herald Sun* article that talks about alleged fraudulent activity. Mind you, I am not aware of any investigation that has confirmed or looked into the source of these sorts of things being ventilated. We have another example today of the opposition yet again pouncing on a *Herald Sun* article and coming in here and stating that it is absolute truth. What concerns me about this – and this is what Mr Batchelor said, and I share these concerns – is that making our hardworking doctors and nurses who work in our public health system the subject of this attack is really unfortunate and really unfair, particularly when I would expect if there are any allegations that have any force that if an investigation is undertaken people are actually asked about what has happened. But coming in here and launching a full-blown attack on our dedicated and hardworking public health workers, like nurses and doctors who work at this hospital, at the Northern Hospital emergency department, and others, is really disappointing but true to form of those opposite – it is what they do. They hate anything publicly funded, they hate the public and they attack our hardworking healthcare workers each and every day.

The Northern Hospital is also a hospital emergency department that people in my region access, and I visited the Northern Hospital just the other week and talked to them about some of the challenges that they are facing. What they talked to me about was that the hospital and its staff actually have a sense of hope and optimism, they take the care of patients who come through their doors incredibly seriously and they want to see good patient outcomes for people who present to the hospital. I know that hearing about this attack launched on them by the Liberal–Nationals, they would be actually devastated, and I share their concerns. It is just appalling. But what I was impressed about with the Northern Hospital – and again I am going to give a shout-out to the Northern Hospital, its staff, nurses and doctors, and say, ‘I want to thank you for all the hard work that you do each and every day, because it is a challenging situation’ – is that not only did our healthcare workers get us through COVID, through all of those challenges, but the challenges continue to present. But they turn up each and every day

because they are dedicated to patient care and providing the best health care they can in our public hospital system.

What they talked to me about when I visited were some of the things that Dr Mansfield talked about – the reasons there is bed block and sometimes ambulance ramping. Some of the things that our government has invested in are targeted at and designed to alleviate some of those things. The implementation of the virtual ED, for example, was one thing which meant that rather than coming and presenting to the emergency department – particularly the Northern Hospital told me that they have seen a reduction in the numbers of people presenting to the ED – they are able to get that quick access to emergency care through the virtual emergency department. They said that has been a very welcome investment by our government. I also visited Austin Health the other day and talked to them about some of the upgrades that we are funding for that hospital but also about the impact that the virtual emergency department has had. They in fact have a pod within their emergency department, so if you do present to the emergency department, you can step into the pod that is within the emergency department and access the virtual emergency department within the hospital.

There are so many innovations in the model of care that are designed to help people not present to the emergency department, like the primary health care clinics. I told this story in this chamber the other week when I was talking about when I cut my finger. I nearly cut the tip of it off and the last thing I wanted to do was go down to the Austin emergency department. It was like, ‘No, I don’t want to go there’, but having a local primary health care clinic in Heidelberg meant that I could just be dropped off there and have that seen to. I did not need really to go to an emergency department. I had a nasty cut on my finger. Yes, I was worried about losing the tip of it, but I got fantastic emergency care at that clinic. I was treated by an emergency physician, and it was fantastic. That is another example of why you do not need to present to an emergency department.

What I was being told by both of those hospitals was that the investments that our government has implemented have meant a reduction in people presenting. Mr Mulholland talked about the government has made a choice about this or that. We did make choices, and I will tell you what some of those choices look like. Our budget has invested an extra \$11.1 billion for health. That is a choice that we made. This year alone we are providing over \$31 billion to our health system, which is the biggest investment in frontline care. That is the absolute choice that we made. You cannot equivocate on that. Also it includes a record \$9.3 billion boost for our hospitals, another choice that we made. We back in our public health system. The funding will also support resources to hospitals that provide high-quality care for Victorians, including clinical and non-clinical staff, procuring medicines and equipment for patients and operating services including emergency departments, inpatient wards and operating theatres.

As Dr Mansfield said, there are lots of complexities in what leads to patients often not being able to be either sent up to a ward or sent to other places within the hospital. As a former official of the nurses union – not a nurse, a lawyer – I worked with lots of nurses and particularly nurses who worked with patients or people in the aged care system. One of the biggest challenges is sometimes when you have got a patient who has come from aged care there is nowhere to discharge them to. That can lead to patients being in the emergency department for too long a period of time. Where else do you put them if there is nowhere to take them? Often in the aged care system, because frail or elderly people were not getting the care urgently and early, they ended up in EDs chronically ill.

There are lots of complexities to this, and it is disappointing that we have got a motion that tries to lump everything into one place and say it is all the government’s fault. If those opposite understood the complexities that lead to some of these problems they would not think that attacking our hardworking public healthcare workers was a way to somehow shine a light on it. This just demonstrates that those opposite are not fit to govern, because they have no idea about it.

It is very disappointing. Again, I want to thank Dr Mansfield for her considered contribution and the way she articulated all of the reasons, particularly given her experience as a doctor and having given

evidence to a previous inquiry into these sorts of matters. Having another inquiry into this would be a complete waste of parliamentary time and resources. It is just nonsense, and again we have another wasted opportunity for a motion from those opposite based on a *Herald Sun* article. Honestly, could we do better? I would like to hear from those opposite about their policies – could they create some? – and about how they think they might address the problem that they say exists, because I have not heard one idea or one policy suggestion from any of those opposite about what they think needs to happen in addressing some of the problems that are raised in this motion. What we know about those opposite is that they have only ever delivered cuts to health. They went to war with our ambulance services when they were last in government, and it took a Labor government to fix the ambulance crisis –

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Because you went to war with them. Acting President, I might address this through you, because I know Ms Crozier is yelling at me and she should address her comments through the Chair. I have said this in this chamber before: when anyone who dies, it is a tragedy. My sympathies and heartfelt condolences go to that man's family or friends. But I will certainly add that a cause of death can only be determined by the coroner. Yet again we have another day of the Liberal-Nationals coming in here and making accusations about causes of death. I said this earlier today when we were talking about farmer suicide: there are family members and friends attached to the person who died. It is a tragedy, and we should not be politicising deaths in this manner when we want to talk about an issue like this.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:11): I also would like to speak about this motion. It is not very often I get to speak about something that I happen to be an expert in. Unlike Dr Mansfield, I am not an expert in medicine in any way, but I am an expert in business intelligence systems, which is exactly what we are talking about here, the collection and collation and reporting of data, including key performance indicators. I will say this: data systems are really complex. I have been through exercises where there are data integrity issues, and investigating these data integrity issues is a really big job. All systems have data integrity issues to some degree. The root causes of those data integrity issues – in some cases, yes, it may be that people have falsified data, but there are also many, many other explanations for this.

The way that this has been stated in this motion concerns me, because it is effectively saying that this is all true – it is not allegations. I do not know these things to be true. I cannot support that staff have routinely falsified data. I do not know that. It should say it is an allegation for a start, so that concerns me. But I do think that these allegations are worthy of investigation, and I am glad to hear that the government supports putting on an external auditor. I note that Ms Crozier wrote a letter to the Auditor-General, and in fact that would have been my first response, to notify the Auditor-General. I have great confidence in the Auditor-General's capabilities. I have seen them do some excellent work. It is one of the few parts of government that I see that works very, very well. I think that they would be well placed to investigate this and find out exactly what has been going on and what the reasons are for it.

I do support investigating it. Nevertheless I cannot support this motion, because it is basically saying what the outcome of the Auditor-General's report or the external auditor's report is going to be. We do not know the causes. I do not understand the incentives going on here either. If someone is falsifying data, what are the incentives behind that? Why are they doing it? I think we need to look at that, because you can see in many in many data systems people go around processes because the processes are designed poorly. Dr Mansfield noted some of these things in her contribution. In a highly dynamic environment like an emergency department, like a hospital, you are going to have complexities with collecting data. I do not know what they might be, but I would say this as well: I think that if there is a problem with data collection, reporting and data integrity, whether it is the Auditor-General or an external auditor or whoever is looking at it, they should look wider than this one single hospital, because if they have got a problem, I find it difficult to believe that only one hospital has this problem, because a lot of hospitals share information. They share information on what systems they are using.

I imagine many would be using the same systems. If this is a systemic problem, then they should look wider than one single hospital. But nevertheless I trust the Auditor-General to look into those things if they choose to go ahead with this investigation. I am sure that the Auditor-General will respond.

There is another issue here, and Dr Mansfield alluded to this: are we actually asking hospitals to report correct things? I saw it all throughout my career where you would have people incentivised by key performance indicators that were inappropriate. They incentivise perverse activities, perverse behaviours, and you end up with things being measured where the measurement is not showing a good outcome. This is a classic management problem where you have people judged by key performance indicators that are not actually in line with whether or not they are doing a good job. Maybe we do have a systemic problem with that. If we do not have a problem with falsification of data, maybe we do have a problem with some of these key performance indicators that the government or the department is asking them to produce. Maybe we do have a problem there. But again, I trust the Auditor-General to be able to identify those sorts of problems if there is a systemic problem here and get to the bottom of it. I am not prepared to stand here and say as a fact that these allegations are true based on a newspaper article. For that reason, the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this motion.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:16): I thank Ms Crozier for bringing this motion to the attention of the chamber: the alleged misrepresentation and falsification of data at Northern Hospital relating to the time patients spend waiting to be off-loaded from an ambulance into the hospital's emergency department. There are claims that data has been falsified to meet statewide targets for ambulances to transfer 90 per cent of patients to hospital staff within 40 minutes. Apparently it has been happening since 2017, with times adjusted by up to an hour. The falsification and manipulation of reporting data has extremely serious implications for the integrity of data and public confidence in our health system. I mean, can we rely on this data? Are other hospitals doing the same thing, feeling the pressure to meet targets? Are waiting times far worse than the data shows?

The Northern Hospital is just outside the Northern Victoria electorate but would certainly service many residents living in the region, such as in Plenty and Yarrambat and Mernda. Northern Victoria is a very large electorate that spans from Mildura right across to Corryong and down to the outskirts of Melbourne. Across Northern Victoria people are waiting too long for ambulances, too long in emergency departments and too long for surgery. Hospitals are full, staff are exhausted and regional patients are getting left behind.

When you look at our health system there is a shortage of hospital beds, particularly in regional areas like Mildura and Wodonga, which does contribute to ambulance ramping. My Nationals colleague Jade Benham has certainly raised these issues and concerns about the state of emergency care at the Mildura Base Public Hospital. The minister's recent announcement of just four subacute beds is not a solution for the overwhelming pressure being faced by frontline staff and emergency departments. Mildura hospital recently experienced a 48-hour code yellow, meaning there were no available beds and patients were left waiting far too long for care. Just last week the *Age* reported that Mildura is now the worst hospital in Victoria for emergency department waits. This is not acceptable, and the minister really does need to urgently outline a long-term plan.

In Wodonga and Albury the situation is just as critical. I know local residents are frustrated that the Labor government have reneged on their promise to build a new hospital for the rapidly growing region. I have received a copy of a submission from the Indigo Shire Council and Towong shire to the Ambulance Victoria inquiry that outlines some of their concerns. It says:

We plea in desperation. Our regional health service is in decline. Our key concerns are on two fronts.

The Albury Wodonga Health service is in crisis. The Albury base hospital struggles with a bed shortage of 40–60 beds everyday. Just last week a Code Yellow was declared, meaning the health service had reached its capacity and all acute beds in the wards and Emergency Department are full. Not a rare occurrence.

The Victorian and NSW State Governments are pushing ahead with an upgrade to the existing hospital on the existing site, when the clear advice of the medical professionals, and a 2021 Clinical Services Plan, is that a new hospital on a greenfield is required. The current plans for the hospital will not address the bed shortage in the longer term.

It goes on to say:

The Ambulance response times for Indigo and Towong for Qtr 3 2024/25 (Code 1 First Response), were the **worst** and **second worst** in the State respectively.

This disappointing result is not new – our concerns have been expressed with the relevant ministers since 2019. In fact the results for both councils have deteriorated over that time. It goes on to say:

The two issues are linked.

The existing hospitals in Albury and Wodonga are not fit for purpose, operating with limited capacity, and struggling with inefficiencies due to their split-campus model.

It says:

In the context of Indigo and Towong councils this is significantly impacting our poor Ambulance Response Times. It is no coincidence that they are the lowest in the State.

...

The dual impact of long ambulance response times, combined with a health service running beyond capacity, can only be a deadly cocktail.

I have spoken with staff who start each shift at that hospital facing ambulance ramping and a significant shortage of hospital beds. Locals are growing tired of raising the issues and being ignored as the state government ploughs ahead to redevelop the existing site with a master plan that fails to meet current needs, let alone future demands. Precious time is wasted searching for beds rather than caring for a patient, and this is not good for patients or for paramedics – for our paramedics it means longer shifts.

I received another email recently after there was an update from Better Border Health, and it says:

We have been alerted to the fact that an elderly patient this week spent ALL NIGHT in an intensive care vehicle ramped at Albury Hospital.

...

That night the temperature dropped to as low as 2.4 degrees in the early hours of the morning.

It goes on to say:

Another consequence was that the paramedics missed both their breaks and had to work beyond the end of their rostered 12 hour 15 minute shift by another 30 minutes.

...

We are sharing this story to highlight that the risk to the community is high and will continue if this redevelopment of Albury hospital continues with no extra beds for four to five years.

Ambulance ramping is happening right across Victoria. Just recently the Victorian Ambulance Union secretary Danny Hill gave evidence to the parliamentary inquiry that ambulances in Bendigo had been ramped for 7 to 8 hours and that an elderly man who had fallen waited 9 hours for an ambulance. The parliamentary inquiry is currently underway. There is another public hearing on Friday, and it is certainly looking at a range of issues. I know the website might say that submissions are closed, but because hearings are still underway I do encourage people to contact the committee secretariat if they have a story to share and would like to make a submission to that inquiry.

These stories I hear regularly speaking to people in my community, and they reflect the real consequences of a health system that is at breaking point. We need more hospital beds in regional Victoria to service the growing population. Our hardworking paramedics need hospitals that allow them to get off the ramp and get out and back and look after patients. Ms Terpstra talked about this motion calling for an inquiry – this motion does not do that at all. But the Nationals do support this motion, because it goes to the heart of the need for reliable data in our health system, and it calls on

the Allan Labor government to appoint an external and independent health expert to review processes relating to the collection of data on ambulance transfer times in public health emergency departments.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:24): I rise today to speak on the opposition motion relating to the latest quarterly Victorian Agency for Health Information data. The government relies on this data when we make decisions about where the resources in the health system are most needed. It is a good thing that we collect this data, because it allows us to know where the resources are needed, what is working and what is not working. When the government receives the data from the health system, we know that the opposition motions in this Legislative Council are rarely the answer to any problems which that data might reveal. What the public deserves and expects is action. Action is delivering an extra \$11.1 billion for health in the 2025–26 budget, totalling \$31 billion in the state's health system in one year. Action is a \$9.3 billion boost to hospitals, giving hospitals every certainty about their continued ability to operate and also giving Victorians certainty that they will have the health system for them when they need it. That is what the public expects, and that is what the public deserves.

On the issue of ambulance times, I might add once again that Victorians know that opposition motions in the Legislative Council are not what helps our ambos save lives. What is helping is more than \$2 billion in additional funding brought in since 2014. What is helping is the \$84 million package in the budget to continue 15 dual-paramedic ambulance crews over the next two years, four peak-period units and 24-hour services in regional Victoria. What is helping is \$58.4 million in the budget to improve patient flow through hospitals, improving efficiency and getting our handover times down.

One thing in this budget which will especially help take the pressure off our ambulance service and our emergency departments is tripling the capacity of the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. Sometimes people in non-life-threatening situations need expert care, assistance or advice but do not always need to go into an emergency department. By moving some of the traffic out of the physical emergency departments or into the virtual one where appropriate, we can make sure that more people are getting the care they need, because health systems need money, and our investments are crucial to making sure that we still have an effective and fair health system for decades to come. But we also need smart initiatives, innovation and projects like this which make sure that the taxpayer and the patients alike are always getting the best possible care at the best possible value for money, because this is what allows for the best use of our resources and for the maximum number of people to get the care they need and to get it in a timely manner. Clearly this approach is finding some success. Despite unprecedented demand, the median ambulance time to treat is now 14 minutes – that is 6 minutes lower than pre pandemic. Victoria is the second-best state in the nation for emergency department patients to be seen on time. We also have the highest proportion of patients who are seen immediately on presentation to an emergency department.

Our investments in the budget will also provide our newly built hospitals with staff, equipment and processes which they need to come online and get to work. Brand new hospitals across the state, including Footscray Hospital, Frankston Hospital and Maryborough and district hospital are getting the funding they need to come online. We are also opening three community hospitals and operationalising three redeveloped emergency departments. Our infrastructure achievements are impressive, but so too are our investments in the healthcare workforce. It is no good having a new hospital if you do not have anyone to work in it, which is why our workforce investments are so important. This includes \$95.1 million over four years to develop a healthcare workforce pipeline, supporting students of nursing and midwifery to complete their qualifications. Our workforce pipeline has been effective. In the last decade or so we have added more than 40,000 new healthcare workers to our system – nurses, midwives, doctors, allied health professionals and other hospital staff. The Allan Labor government also signed off on a historic 28.4 per cent pay increase for nurses and midwives, which will be crucial to the workforce attraction and retention efforts. It is a simple idea. If you need to attract new, highly skilled workers and retain your existing workers, offering higher salaries is not a bad way of doing it. Whether it is building healthcare infrastructure or building our

healthcare workforce, the Allan Labor government has a strong record in planning for the future and taking the long-term approach, because making sure that our health system is working for decades from now matters, as it is important business for all of us in this chamber.

Both in planning for the long term and dealing with the challenges as they arise, the Allan Labor government takes a serious adult approach to maintaining the integrity of our healthcare system. Take, for instance, last week's allegations of misreporting of the ambulance turnover data in one hospital. The government recognised the seriousness of this issue but did not take a kneejerk reaction; they took a serious adult response. That is why the Minister for Health in the other place ordered the department to work with the hospital to conduct an investigation and establish the relevant facts. The department investigating is an obvious first step, because the government learned about these allegations last week, at the same time that everybody else did. Before we can take any action we need to establish the facts through a proper and thorough process.

All health services in this state are obliged to follow very rigorous data reporting standards, and we expect that data reporting always to be timely and accurate. In fact implementation of Victoria's updated standards for ambulance and emergency care began as recently as February this year. The public is entitled to an explanation as to what is going on. That is why the department is investigating the issue and treating it with the seriousness it deserves. But no doubt the people who would have most been disturbed to hear about this would have been those people who work in the healthcare system themselves. They are the ones who now know how important, timely and accurate the data reporting is. They experience the consequences of the very hard work they do day to day in taking care of Victorians, because they are the people that we are relying on. It is important that we do not allow alleged instances of wrongdoing occurring at one hospital to tarnish the reputation of our healthcare system and healthcare workers across the board.

Even when situations such as this are not coming up, ambulance turnover times are always front of mind in this government's approach to the healthcare system. That is why in the budget handed down in May we invested \$58.4 million in getting the ambulance handover times down at some of the busiest hospitals in the state where the resources are needed most. This investment included funding for more beds at high-demand hospitals and more surge inpatient beds in the places that need them as well as funding for short-stay units. These investments were made so that we can ensure that the wait times are getting down and patient flow through the emergency department is efficient so ambulances can spend more time on the roads. In short, this is so our healthcare system can function as efficiently and as effectively as possible. We did this so it can help take the pressure off the emergency departments so that we can make sure patients receive the medical help and care that they need and deserve quickly, because Victorians deserve the security of knowing that if something were to happen to them they would have an ambulance service and a health system fit for purpose that can take care of them and their families in a time of need in a timely manner. That is why the Allan Labor government puts patients first and backs in our healthcare workers by providing \$31 billion for the health system in last month's budget. This will be the largest ever investment in frontline care, giving our health system the funding it needs to do its job and giving our healthcare workers the support they need to do their jobs.

It also bears mentioning that in recent times we have seen a 10 per cent reduction in ambulance handover times at several of our biggest metropolitan hospitals. This is a great result for our health system and for patients. It means that Victorians are getting better care quicker, making life easier for our hardworking paramedics. This only happens as a result of the hard work of the healthcare workers and the smart investments made by the Allan Labor government – bringing in additional resources where they are needed most and where they can be utilised best and best brought for great results.

But we want to see the handover times come down even further, which is why we have made the investment we did in the budget, ensuring that we can have a health system which does not just meet our challenges in the present but will still be fit for purpose in decades to come. We hold healthcare workers to a high standard in doing this difficult job and they deserve the respect and the gratitude of their elected representatives, their government and their communities in their state.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:33): I am pleased to rise on Ms Crozier's motion 970. I would also compliment all the contributions made to date from Ms Crozier, yourself Acting President Broad and Mr Limbrick. Just on Mr Limbrick's contribution, I think we share some experience in enterprise management systems, and not to contradict anything he said – what he said was quite true – but to augment it: management information systems can give you bogus and misleading data, but I have never known an organisation where the administrators up the line do not examine the data and do not give it a qualitative test –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Order!

Richard WELCH: where they do not give it some form of qualitative test and they do not –

Members interjecting.

Richard WELCH: they do not cross-reference it with real-world deep-diving in. Whilst it is possible that data can, like all statistics, be misleading, in the real world when you are using management information systems like this you test it against reality regularly so that you have a touch of it. It would be massively surprising to me if the data was misleading just through a structural problem of the data gathering system, that the administrators themselves had not picked it up at some point along the line.

The other point I would make is in all instances where organisations I have been involved in have suffered fraud it has never been just one instance. If you find a failing in the system, it is never going to be one instance; it is going to be multiple instances. You just need to keep looking and you will find it, because if there is a breakdown somewhere, it will happen. That can apply to the one place, but if it is the same procedure across multiple hospitals, then from an abundance of caution you would absolutely want to check in all of those places to see whether this data now has a systemic problem across the place. That is going to be accentuated when there are perverse interests at stake. So if you are under incredible pressure to meet KPIs, the incentive to fudge is there and extensive, so it is very likely to occur.

What we have got here is a deep concern about a governance failure, a compliance failure, and if it is systemic, then it is probably a cultural failure as well. If you have bad data, you are going to have bad outcomes; you are going to have bad decisions made on the basis of bad data. No-one in this chamber is denying the importance of this information; everyone is in total agreement about that. On that basis then, if you have credible concerns about the way that data is being prepared and represented and how we are acting on that data, of course you should investigate it. And exactly as this says, you should have an independent person audit it. The last thing you do when an accounts department has committed a fraud is get the accounts department to audit their own accounts. You get someone independent in to look at the numbers and objectively determine what the data says in reality. No-one can argue with that, because we have all agreed that the data is important and we have all agreed that the data has real-world consequences.

We know it has real-world consequences because we were reminded all too sharply by what happened in the last week in my electorate within a stone's throw of a major hospital, where five ambulances were ramped and where the procedures for that hospital may not have been reviewed appropriately because the data told them they did not need to, perhaps. These are the obvious questions, the real-world questions, anyone on the street would ask. Perhaps if we are getting the data wrong perhaps we have not got the right procedures and perhaps we have not made the right choices, so that when a man is bleeding to death within 5 kilometres of a major hospital and we have five ambulances ramped they cannot leave to go and save his life. This has real-world consequences.

I take some exception that every time we want to question or make accountable or have a bit of transparency, the rhetorical device from across the way is that if you question anything in the health

system, you hate doctors. It happens again and again. If we question anything about how you are going to tax farmers for emergency services, we hate the SES, and if we question anything about this frankly insane activity centre urban planning, we hate housing. It does not work anymore. It is infantile, frankly, when you talk about the gravity of what we are discussing.

I strongly endorse Ms Crozier's motion. I think we should have an audit; in fact we need an audit of it – a proper investigation. If it has happened somewhere once, it is definitely going to have happened somewhere else, and in an abundance of caution you do not leave it to chance. Why would you leave this to chance? In a matter as serious as public health where lives are genuinely at stake you do not leave it to chance; you go and look at it. I do not even know why it is a question that you would do it. The only question really is that the government wants to yet again investigate itself, and what that means is the community will not get the reassurance that they are getting an independent and unbiased view of the facts. The facts are all anyone needs in this situation, and then we can determine whether the money being spent is being spent right, whether the money being spent actually gives us procedures so that we do not have people dying waiting for an ambulance when they could so easily have been saved.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:40): I want to make a few comments in relation to the debate we have had this afternoon. I think Mr Welch summed up a number of issues and the frustration that I have in relation to how, when we bring these motions in, the government makes, as he said I think, infantile comments about the role that we have and what we are trying to do here. I am very grateful for those clinicians that speak to me and express their concerns about what is going on, who are raising issues like this that we are debating today about the fraudulent activity and why there needs to be an investigation.

I just want to make a couple of points, and I do want to thank the speakers. I am not disagreeing with what Dr Mansfield said – it is what I have been saying in terms of the entire system needing to be looked at and reviewed because there are issues right along the system. And let us not forget – Mr Batchelor mentioned the Ambulance Victoria inquiry – it was the government who voted against having that inquiry. They voted against having the inquiry that is being undertaken now, and that just shows the extent of what they will do to stop any transparency, any accountability and getting to the bottom of what the issues are. That is our job. When these issues are raised, we have a responsibility to bring them into the house and to provide some solutions, and part of that is me writing to the Auditor-General, which I did, asking the Auditor-General to perform an audit of the ambulance transfer data for all Victorian hospital emergency departments that are required to report this data.

This motion is not talking about a parliamentary inquiry – Ms Terpstra went off on a completely ludicrous tangent. She was calling this bulltish, running through the chamber calling this bulltish. I am being polite – she did not say that; she was calling it BS and other things, saying it has just come from a news article. Well, I thank that news outlet for putting this information into the public domain, because if it was not, it would be covered up, just like the death of the man who sadly and tragically died in Blackburn. If we do not expose these through outlets like the media, then you guys have a free-for-all run. You cover up enough as it is. It is a damn disgrace that you go out there and criticise, like you do, anyone that is writing about what is going on in this state and the dire situation of our health system.

This motion asks for an external and independent health expert to review processes relating to the collection of data on ambulance transfer times in public health emergency departments, as required for reporting to the Department of Health and the Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI), because as Mr Berger said in his contribution, the collection of data is required for where resources are needed – and that is the point: it is linked. So if there is manipulation of this data, why is it being done? Are they trying to do it because they are worried that the resources are not going to be provided in this busy emergency department? This is not an attack on the staff. They are under so much pressure. This is the busiest emergency department in the state – the biggest – and it has got a huge amount of

patients going through it. We must understand what is going on, and we need that independence, unlike what the minister said:

These allegations are serious and the Department of Health will work with Northern Health to investigate them.

We do not need the government looking into itself. We need an independent external investigation. But that is not what the government has said it will do. They might change their minds – let us hope they do. But I say again, for the government to dismiss this in the way they have, to not take it seriously, to not understand the significance of what we are talking about here – these are people’s lives that are at risk. Victorians’ lives are at risk because of their ongoing failures within the system. The manipulation of data is very serious. It needs not only the Auditor-General to do his job but somebody else to do their job and look into the department and the reporting of the information that goes to the department and VAHI, how it gets transferred across and how the resources are then provided. Are they sufficient? Is it being met? I urge members to support this motion.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (14): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (21): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

SBS headquarters

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:52): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is one of two government-funded national broadcasters, both of which are based in Sydney;
- (b) that according to the SBS report, 2023–24, of the 1319 SBS staff, 80 per cent were based in New South Wales, while only 14 per cent were based in Victoria;

(2) recognises:

- (a) that Victoria has the highest proportion of population born overseas in Australia;
- (b) that Melbourne’s population is increasing faster than Sydney and becoming increasingly more multicultural;

(3) expresses concern that the SBS report, 2021–22, and the federal Minister for Communications news release of 27 April 2023 indicate a feasibility study on the possible relocation of SBS headquarters from Armonk to Western Sydney;

(4) expresses further concern at extraordinary revelations by a senior SBS official at the 12 March 2025 hearing of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee’s inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria that the decision to base their new production hub in western Sydney was one forced on SBS by the Albanese Labor government, despite the Minister for Communications claiming in a media release on 8 December 2024 that this was an SBS board and management initiative;

(5) condemns the Albanese Labor government for betraying Victoria by denying us the opportunity to host a production hub; and

(6) calls on the Albanese Labor government to advocate for a Melbourne-based SBS headquarters and to facilitate the process of setting up in a multicultural Melbourne location like Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

I am delighted to speak on this notice of motion in relation to SBS. We know that SBS is one of our two national broadcasters, both of which are based in Sydney, and this motion is attempting to point out some recent events, some past events and some of the history and really advocate on behalf of the Victorian people, really stand up for Victoria's multicultural, multifaith and migrant communities across the state and advocate for our fair share of creative funding, of arts funding, of multicultural funding, because our multicultural communities matter too, and when a government just ignores that, it should be, in a bipartisan way, called out.

We have seen this government previously spend millions of dollars of taxpayers money to run ad campaigns during elections about wanting our fair share for Victoria, but this government has been mute on the fact that we had a federal government pick western Sydney over us for not one but both national broadcasters. In the case of SBS, it specifically forced the decision on the SBS board to locate SBS in western Sydney. The Liberals and Nationals are here to say that Victorian multicultural communities matter too. Places like Dandenong and Broadmeadows and other multicultural communities and growth areas across the state should have been considered for these kinds of opportunities. It is our role as a state, and it should be the role of any state government worth its salt, to represent Victorians. The Victorian government should have been in a room with the communications minister putting Victoria's case forward that SBS should have a physical presence here in Victoria as part of our multicultural communities, in the neighbourhoods that they live in, that rely on SBS.

The SBS charter purposes are uniquely defined, setting it apart from other media organisations in the country. At its core SBS exists to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcasting services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, reflecting the nation's diverse society, and the primary function of the SBS is to broadcast programs that cater to Australia's various linguistic communities. This includes news, current affairs, entertainment and educational content in languages other than English, making vital information accessible to those who may not be proficient in English. This commitment extends to providing news and analysis that offers diverse perspectives on national and international events, often representing or presenting viewpoints that may not be widely covered by the mainstream media. The charter also mandates the SBS to contribute to a sense of national identity while acknowledging and celebrating the country's multicultural fabric. This involves creating content that reflects the contemporary Australian experience in all its forms. In attempting to meet these commitments it would be far more representative and valuable for the SBS to be headquartered in somewhere like Dandenong, or Broadmeadows in my electorate, where they can be part of our diverse communities here in Melbourne's outer suburbs. It goes without saying that these are the sorts of commitments that are vital for our multicultural communities to feel connected – connected to each other in a new country and connected to their new country as well and made to feel a part of that country.

So it is not a stretch to say that connection needs to be felt the length and breadth of the country, particularly in areas where these communities are strongly represented. I guess this debate comes before us because of the federal Labor government and because they have demonstrated that they simply do not care about these aims, that political expediency for their own survival is more important. What is worse, I guess, is that they misled Victorians in doing so; they misled Victorians about what they were doing and their intent. The former Minister for Communications, who just happens to have her electorate in western Sydney and is now the Attorney-General, Michelle Rowland, announced in December last year that western Sydney will become home to a new Special Broadcasting Service production hub thanks to an Albanese government investment to commence the expansion of the network's capacity and reach. The minister said that western Sydney is a diverse and dynamic region – the same could be said of Dandenong or Broadmeadows or Kalkallo or Wyndham; the same could be said of our communities. And this is the key point: the minister is quoted in her statement as saying:

I thank the SBS Board and management for their initiative in proposing this exciting project ...

I will repeat it:

I thank the SBS Board and management for their initiative in proposing this exciting project ...

But that is not the whole story. I sit on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which held its inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria, and it was revealed in those public hearings that senior SBS executives said that:

The opportunities available to us were within the parameters of western Sydney.

So we know not from the federal government but from SBS themselves that Labor cherry-picked western Sydney for this project – of mythic political fame, western Sydney – as the only place that SBS could set up its production hub, the only place. It provided the investment; it made a direct pitch to the board and said the parameters of this investment need to be in western Sydney.

I think that any Victorian government worth its salt that says it cares about multicultural communities should and would and hopefully will be making a public statement instead of being mute that this is not good enough and Victoria deserves that investment as well. Victoria has a higher proportion of population born overseas than New South Wales does. Yet because western Sydney has a whole lot more marginal seats the government thinks, 'Okay, this is a great way to sandbag electorates', rather than thinking, 'What is the best outcome?' You have to look at this contextually. The fact is that we have two national broadcasters and one of them, the ABC, has already decided to go to western Sydney. So instead of looking at the whole map of our film production sector and thinking, 'Okay, ABC's gone to western Sydney. We're going to invest in multicultural Victoria with SBS', the federal Labor government looked at this with a political lens instead and said, 'We're going to invest into SBS in western Sydney as well.' Western Sydney – they get the ABC, they get the SBS, they get an airport, they get everything. Yet the Victorian government is mute. There is no criticism. This government used to make a lot of nicknames about prime ministers being the prime minister for Sydney. Well, in this case we actually do have a prime minister for Sydney and a communications minister for Sydney, because they have chosen Sydney again on this decision, betraying our multicultural communities. And again, the Victorian government need to stick up for this.

Victoria's population is growing faster than New South Wales. It is becoming more diverse. This is a slap in the face and shows how federal Labor, under Mr Albanese and Ms Rowland, both Sydney MPs, really feel about Victoria. It is meant to be the Special Broadcasting Service, but it may as well be called the Sydney Broadcasting Service with this decision and this investment, which the minister deceptively tried to claim was an initiative of the SBS board. The SBS said, 'No, no, no. The parameters that were given to us were western Sydney.' So of course they are going to make that decision when that is the only decision they were given. Victoria ought to be calling that out. The Liberals and Nationals are calling that out because we want a share of those production jobs. We want our multicultural communities to feel like they are close to a service that they rely upon every day.

SBS has a lot of support in our growing communities, particularly in my electorate in the northern suburbs, but unfortunately we do not hear that and we have not heard that publicly from this government. Where is the Minister for Multicultural Affairs or the minister for the arts releasing a public statement condemning this and saying, 'We want this in Victoria'? Where is the ministerial diary log of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs or the Minister for Creative Industries meeting with the federal minister for communications on this very topic? You will not see it, because this government has little interest in advocating for team Victoria, in advocating for Victorian jobs and Victorian multicultural communities. These multicultural communities in northern Melbourne or our south-east have just as much right as western Sydney to host an SBS production hub and to see their diversity recorded and broadcast and valued. They want to feel valued, and something like this in Victoria would have been fantastic for our diverse communities. It would have been fantastic for areas like Broadmeadows or Wyndham or Dandenong, but they will not get that under Labor because they have been sacrificed for a grubby vote-buying exercise again in western Sydney.

Victorian multicultural communities deserve a government that fights for them and does not stay quiet when they are betrayed. In this case, quite clearly from the evidence that we saw in the hearing, they have been betrayed by the federal Labor government, and there ought to be a bipartisan effort in calling this out – a tripartisan effort in calling this out on behalf of Victorian migrant communities. This motion calls on the Allan government to essentially do their job and advocate for a Melbourne-based SBS presence to facilitate the process of setting up in a diverse community like Broadmeadows or Dandenong.

I cannot see the future, but I can have a pretty good guess about what we are going to hear from those opposite who get up to speak to this motion. We are going to hear speeches about how the Labor government here in Victoria truly does respect and value multicultural communities, except for giving leave for our Sydney-based Prime Minister to show such contempt for our great state and not call out the federal government for bypassing Victoria, as we have seen so often. It is really an opportunity to stand up to the Prime Minister for this flagrant bias and to stand up to the federal government. Just say that you are disappointed, acknowledge that you are disappointed that Victoria was not in the conversation. What is so important, particularly in portfolios like the arts or multicultural affairs, is that you are making sure the voices of your communities are heard, the voices of your communities are on the table and are in those offices, in the ministerial wing, in those departments, putting Victoria on the map. Something like this would have been in the interests of all Victorians.

For SBS to fulfil its obligations to all Victorians, not just those in marginal electorates, it is vital that they have a presence, a footprint, in all regions of Australia that they seek to represent, that they seek to live in. I have mentioned Broadmeadows, which is close to my electorate office, and I have mentioned Dandenong, another vibrant multicultural community, and I am sure members on all sides of the house will talk about their very own diverse communities and how well connected they are with SBS. I have appeared on SBS Hindi, I have appeared on SBS Assyrian, I have appeared on a number of SBS programs. How fantastic would it be to have some radio studios in areas that they are covering? It would be brilliant, and it is incumbent upon the government to advocate for something like this.

Victoria is a multicultural state, I think quite proudly. It is also the fastest growing state in the country, and Melbourne is already bigger than Sydney according to 2023–24 ABS data. You would think that the federal government would recognise this, but no, in December 2024 Minister Rowland made her announcement that SBS would be going to western Sydney. She had the gall to thank the SBS board for that initiative, even though we now know, through that inquiry, that the parameters that the board was given were for western Sydney only. This means that not only did Victoria not have a seat at the table to have those discussions but they were completely bypassed and ignored – that is completely not good enough.

This motion calls on the state government to do their job and advocate for a Melbourne-based SBS headquarters and facilitate the process of setting up one in a multicultural location like Broadmeadows, like Dandenong. By doing this they would be doing a great service to our diverse communities in Melbourne's north, the south-east and indeed across Victoria. It is so important that our multicultural communities feel valued and respected and have an ability to gain employment but feel connected to a service that they rely upon so much. We want it to be special. It is the Special Broadcasting Service. It should not be the Sydney broadcasting service, but that is what we have seen. SBS have about double the number of employees in Sydney as they do in Victoria. That is just not good enough. We want those jobs here. I have had my criticisms of the ABC over time, but we want those ABC jobs in Melbourne too. Yet the ABC makes the decision to go to Parramatta, and Victoria do not blink an eyelid because they are not actively at the table fighting for those jobs and what it means to Victoria.

This motion can go either of two ways. It can descend into a lot of silliness or it can be a genuine, united call from this chamber for an SBS presence in Victoria. It can be the genuine start of a conversation, not just one in the Labor caucus, but one where important decisions are made. It can be one that kickstarts some of the ministers – the minister for the arts or the Minister for Multicultural Affairs or the Premier – to sit down and have a conversation with the federal Labor government, the

Prime Minister for Sydney, and say, ‘You gave this commitment to SBS in western Sydney. We would like an equivalent commitment. Not only would we like it, we demand it.’ It is incumbent on all of our leaders to take action on behalf of their communities. I know both Hume and Dandenong, and other councils, have all called for this. Many of us have worked with those councils and communities and want to see this become a reality. I commend this motion to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:12): I also would like to talk about the SBS and potentially moving it to Victoria. I am a bit puzzled by some of Mr Mulholland’s comments about the SBS, and I will tell you why. When I was a young man I used to watch SBS a lot, and the reason I watched it was because I was living in the 20th century and it was difficult to watch foreign movies. We have a very large immigrant population in Australia, many of them with foreign-language-speaking backgrounds, and it was probably very difficult for them to watch television in their own language as well. So I can see how historically it would have had some importance for those communities. My family is a member of the culturally and linguistically diverse community, and I am the only person in my house that has even heard of the SBS. Everyone in my house is bilingual, and no-one has heard of the SBS except for me, because I used to watch it when I was younger.

The south-east is a very diverse area, as Mr Mulholland pointed out, and I have both friends of my family and friends of my kids from the Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian, Indian, Russian and Ukrainian communities, just about every community that you can imagine, and I have never heard any of them talk about the SBS. I certainly do not know of any of them watching the SBS or listening to SBS radio, and that is because just about all of these communities can watch the shows themselves. My wife watches Japanese television all the time. You can just watch it over the internet. You can watch anything you want over the internet. Even before streaming services were really popular, I know lots of people from the Chinese community and the Middle Eastern community – you used to see those big dishes on the tops of their houses. And that was not because they were watching SBS; they were watching their own country’s television from satellite TV. That is why you used to see those satellite dishes everywhere. You do not see them so much anymore because you do not really need them anymore, because you can just watch it over the internet, like my family does, quite commonly.

But the other weird thing about all of this is: with the SBS, I do not understand why it needs government funding at all. Now, I know Mr Mulholland’s ex-colleagues at the Institute of Public Affairs did a lot of work on privatising the ABC, but with the SBS there is an even better case: it is already semicommercial; they have already got advertisements. You just increase the amount of advertisements a bit, change the streaming service to a subscription service like every other service that people access these days and defund it, and if people want to watch it, they can pay for it, like everything else that happens here. Instead we want to move 1319 employees to Victoria. I suppose it is nice to have lots of employees and stuff, but I do not see why taxpayers should be funding this at all.

The other reason that the SBS used to exist – it still exists, but you know, not many people watch it, I do not think, these days – was so that Australians could watch foreign movies and be exposed to foreign content and see subtitles and stuff. I was always interested in foreign movies; I used to watch lots of weird Spanish and French movies on SBS when I was younger.

Michael Galea: Which ones?

David LIMBRICK: Lots of them, actually, and a few Japanese movies too. But it just astounds me these days that anyone thinks that – like, one of the top-rating television shows in Australia now is Korean, *Squid Game*. You can watch it in Korean. We happily watch foreign television all the time on just about any streaming service, whether it is Netflix or any of these other ones. You can watch foreign movies, foreign TV shows, whatever you like; you can just pay for it and watch it, and some of it is really great content. I am a fan of *Squid Game* myself. It is a bit scary, but it is an interesting concept. I love watching some Korean TV shows and Japanese TV shows. I can watch TV shows from any part of the world, any time I want, on a streaming service, and I do not need the taxpayer to fund it for me. I do not need the SBS to choose what I see.

And here is another problem with the SBS: the SBS chooses what content they are going to show to Australian audiences. Let me tell you, that is a problem in itself. There are two problems here. One, you might be familiar: a while ago the local Vietnamese community, the very large Vietnamese community in South-East Metro, were very upset with the SBS because they were showing stuff that was effectively the Vietnamese government's propaganda, the very government that they escaped to come to Australia as refugees from. They were not very happy about it at all. And I will tell you another thing –

Michael Galea: Bad decision – they should be shut down.

David LIMBRICK: Well, that was it. They were very upset about it. And I will tell you another thing: I have spoken to members of the local Japanese community about some of the stuff that SBS shows, and SBS only seems to show some of the weirdest stuff. They show this weird, fringe stuff from Japan that no-one has ever heard of. The Japanese people that I have spoken to are absolutely horrified that this is what their culture is being shown as to Australians; luckily hardly anyone watches it. But they are absolutely horrified that this has been portrayed as normal Japanese culture when it is really weird, fringe stuff that the SBS seems to choose. It always has been; that is why people used to watch it, because they liked the weird, fringe stuff. I used to like the weird, fringe stuff, too, to be honest. So I do not support moving the SBS and having a physical presence; I support the SBS not having a physical presence anywhere.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:18): Well, well, well. I found it amusing to be lectured to about the arts and creative industry by those opposite in this motion here. I really have enjoyed listening to this debate, even though it has only just started. What we usually get from those opposite us is cuts and defunding for the arts and creative industries, and I think it is awesome that you are not only supportive of the SBS but that there is a real sense of synergy around the inclusiveness between Victoria and the content and vision and purpose of the SBS. To me, that is a by-default way of saying that you endorse the inclusiveness of our government and our commitment to the diversity of our government and our commitment to the diversity of the Victorian community. And what better match than having SBS in Victoria?

I think that is an awesome idea. I am amazed, given what we hear both economically and data-wise from you opposite all the time – that the sky is falling in – that then you finally owned up that we have got the highest population growth. Thank you for saying that, because it is actually true. Our economy is growing in Victoria. Again, another accidental admission that you know deep down that things are going reasonably well in Victoria. There is always something to do and there are always things to fix, but things are going a lot better than what those opposite actually say. Usually we hear all of this stuff running us down.

I actually originally thought that this motion was another way of saying, 'Don't look at us. Don't look at the fights that we are having within our own party here in Victoria, within the Liberal Party. We'll just have a chat about something from Sydney for 90 minutes.' That is what I really thought was behind this. But now I can see there is a real passion and support for the principles of the SBS and for the diversity of our state, and on that basis I will now respond to the motion. I believe the motion will be amended in a few minutes time by agreement, which is good.

A member: A Liberal initiative, the SBS – Macolm Fraser's government.

David Davis: And my good friend Petro Georgio.

Jacinta ERMACORA: What an awesome small-l liberal he was, yes. There does not seem to be much of that going on in this chamber.

David Davis: He was. I went to his funeral recently.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, it was a great loss. I will take that up, yes. I acknowledge the contribution of Petro Georgiou to Victoria.

I will go on to backing, broadly speaking, what you are saying, but I cannot resist highlighting just how much the Allan Labor government is supporting the creative industries in Victoria, and in that regard it makes us well placed to host a move of the SBS to Victoria should that come about. We already have a thriving screen industry, strongly supported by the state government through VicScreen, the state's creative and economic screen development agency. Only a couple of weeks ago I had the honour of visiting the set of I think Victoria's first-ever Apple TV production that is being made. It is a series called *The Dispatcher*, and I guess it is a bit of a secret what it is about – they did not tell us that. They were shooting in Warrnambool, and they were explaining to us just how many jobs were being created, and we could see it. Hotels were full, the community and the restaurants were buzzing, and that was all because of Apple's production of this series, which we will see next year sometime, but also the role that VicScreen plays. I met VicScreen representatives there at Flagstaff Hill in Warrnambool, and it was terrific to hear how supportive and passionate they are about the Victorian screen industry. When I then later conversed with the producers of the program, they quietly said to me how absolutely supportive VicScreen are for their production and their industry. It is not often that industries actually talk about how wonderful government departments are at supporting their industries. I am thrilled to mention that in this debate, because we are sort of being accused of not supporting creative industries and not bothering, but in actual fact we are very carefully and intelligently investing in the screen industry in Victoria.

The government's first screen strategy, VicScreen, aimed to put Victoria at the forefront of the global screen entertainment boom, and it helped secure the state's reputation as a global destination for screen and games production. The strategy is in its final stages and is expected to create 44,000 jobs and generate \$1.7 billion in direct economic expenditure in Victoria. The Victorian screen rebate and the Victorian Production Fund helped fuel the pipeline of local, national and international projects across film, television and digital games, as well as visual effects, animation and post-production work.

The producers were talking to me about the trainees that they have on the project. They are all Victorian trainees, including trainees with all abilities and diverse and inclusive trainees, which is very, very important. Then of course half the community put their hand up to be extras, as usually happens. I think it is a really positive thing that we do invest in creative industries and the screen industry in Victoria. I am very proud that *The Dispatcher* is being shot in my regional community, in Portland and Warrnambool, but also in other parts of Victoria.

In closing, I would just comment on Mr Limbrick's contribution. I am no expert, but I suspect that his 'You can get it overseas' approach to SBS might be a little bit reductionist in that I suspect that what SBS has to offer is an Australian interpretation of multicultural and diverse communities and a contextualising of those multicultural communities within Australia. Yes, it provides international movies and products made overseas, but I think it is the Australian context that really helps, that gelling of our most successful migration program in the world, so much so that 50 per cent of Australians either were born overseas or their parents were born overseas – and I can see people from migrant communities sitting in this chamber right at this moment who could probably attest to that statistic.

All up, I think SBS coming to Melbourne would be a great thing to happen. I think it would reflect the diversity of our community, and it would reflect the support of our government and the new support of the opposition to diversity and inclusion and multiculturalism in our community. I will leave my contribution there, and I look forward to hearing some of the other contributions.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:28): I am pleased to rise on Mr Mulholland's motion 892. I thoroughly endorse everything Mr Mulholland said about the fact that this is in a sense a very proudly parochial motion championing Victoria and championing Victoria multiculturalism. In some real senses Victoria has led the way on a successful multicultural society, creating a template for many other areas in Australia that followed our lead in the postwar period and beyond. We have a special role to play, we have special needs, we have an audience and we have communities that would have an augmented sense of their value when seeing the government reflect their value in the institutions it builds around them, and that includes SBS.

But I want to take a slight detour in some of this as well, because I think there is also a broader theme. Those who are old enough can remember the comedic interviews between John Clarke and Bryan Dawe – you know, the end fell off the boat and those ones. Well, there was one that they did in a similar vein where John Clarke was being interviewed and he was constantly substituting the word ‘Australia’ with ‘Sydney’, so it was the ‘Australia Symphony Orchestra’ et cetera, and every time Bryan Dawe corrected him, he said, ‘Yeah, that’s right, Sydney.’ What we saw in the 1980s and early 90s in Australia was a cultural drift, an economic drift and a corporate drift from Melbourne to Sydney. We saw lots of corporate headquarters go to Sydney. We certainly saw Melbourne lose its crown as the banking capital of Australia to Sydney. We also saw the ABC retreat. Once, the Melbourne part of ABC was the crown jewel; it retreated into Sydney and we saw similar with the SBS.

In some senses all the other things that have been mentioned are true in that this is about multiculturalism and supporting multiculturalism in a practical way, but it is also a genuine, practical thing that we as Victorians should not allow ourselves to fall into – this cultural, economic drift away from the state – because centres of gravity pull things unto themselves and they gather more unto themselves as they go. That is always going to be the case between Melbourne and Sydney in particular. If you allow it to happen, it will happen. It will happen very normally. What we have seen is the fact that Melbourne was not even put into the discussion – it was not even in consideration, in effect. You can see that happening in real time. One decision leads to another decision, and then other options get closed out and we get closed out of the conversation.

We are Australia’s biggest city by far now, and there are other comparisons that mean that we are even bigger again if you include Geelong and things like that. We are entitled to our share of the cultural capital of the nation, whether that is festivals, whether that is public servants who serve the nation, but absolutely cultural capital in terms of the arts and in terms of broadcasting services that serve us, who are just under 25 to 30 per cent of the nation’s population but getting roughly 12 per cent of the expenditure on these things. We know that it supports an ecosystem. It is not the mere fact of broadcasting; it is the skills that are called on and needed so that we can then have pathways for people pursuing the arts in our community, many of them from the multicultural communities in particular, so that people from our community can see themselves represented in the media. I think of all our communities – the Indian community, the Chinese Australian community, the Somalian community.

One thing I have learned around the world is every city that is multicultural has in a sense its own style of multiculturalism based on who has come to the place. In London it is a very Indian and Pakistani multiculturalism, and it gives it a distinct flavour. In Australia it used to be heavy Greek and Italian influences, and now we have got greater Chinese, Indian and Sri Lankan influences. They are all equal and interesting in their own way. But they are distinct in their own way, and Melbourne’s particular version of it is not represented properly on the national stage, because the key tool by which it is amplified is missing. We have somewhere between 12 and 15 per cent of SBS employees coming out of Melbourne. We occupy barely one floor of one building in Federation Square. That is it. That is the whole of it. No-one can tell me that that does not have knock-on effects in terms of who gets asked to do what, where the ecosystem sprawls out to, who gets engaged with, who is the easy phone call, who can come in at short notice – all these things cascade out.

I would like to see us parochially do the right thing for Victoria and fight for Victoria. Stop the cultural drift. Reverse it: let Sydney argue why they should have it, rather than us having to stand here arguing why we have not got it. There should be no natural default to Sydney on these things, and yet there is. I endorse Mr Mulholland’s comments. Let us not make this political; let us make this Victorian. We are entitled to better. We should stick up for the community. If we are not sticking up for the Victorian multicultural community, who else is going to on the national stage? It is our job to do it, so let us do it. We should have SBS headquartered here. Why shouldn’t we? Why wouldn’t we be ambitious like that? We should have more of the ABC pie to boot, and anything else that comes along we should have our share of it, because (a) we have got the talent, (b) we have got the community that would value it and benefit from it and (c) it is our job to make sure that these things happen.

I warmly, warmly endorse Mr Mulholland's motion. I think whatever the fate of this motion, it is something we should not drop. I think we should go on and pursue this further over the next couple of years in particular.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:59): I rise to contribute, on behalf of the Greens, to motion 892 in Mr Mulholland's name. In reflecting on this motion, it notes that the Special Broadcasting Service is one of two government-funded national broadcasters, both of which are currently based in Sydney; highlights figures based within the SBS report 2023–24 which recognise Victoria as having the highest proportion of population born overseas in the country; highlights that Melbourne's population is increasing faster than Sydney's and is becoming increasingly multicultural; lists a range of other points expressing concern, further concern and condemnation in some parts; and ultimately calls on the Allan Labor government to advocate for a Melbourne-based SBS headquarters and to facilitate a process of setting such a headquarters up in a multicultural Melbourne location like Broadmeadows or Dandenong, or as has been mentioned, it could also be in other locations.

The debate so far has been quite interesting. We have heard advocacy for a privatised SBS. We have heard advocacy for a paid streaming service over a free SBS, and that sounds like quite a hellish landscape to me. I think something that is universal and does unite people across our communities, irrespective of your political leanings, is access to free arts and news media and access to free viewing of sport, for example. These are things that are universal goods that we all benefit from, and whether you watch the programming or not, these are a universal good. Reverting to a world where it is user pays and those with means have access I think is a less equal world, and that is not one that I would want to look forward to.

I think there has been also concern raised around policing of the content that is shown on SBS. I think this probably is not the place, the forum, for that. I imagine you could contact the SBS and make a complaint if you have any concerns about what they are showing, but I do not think this motion, this debate today, is the place for it.

From what I have seen and heard in the chamber today, I think there is going to be a bit of argy-bargy over potential amendments to the wording of this motion about who said what and when, whether someone was forced or not forced. That detail, that granularity, I think is going to be borne out in those discussions over the amendments in the remaining 39 minutes or so on this motion, so I am not going to be drawn into that. I think that will hopefully resolve in a basis where we have got some more consensus around this issue. What I am going to focus on is paragraph 6, which is hopefully where we are going to land, and that is calling on this state Labor government to advocate for a Melbourne-based SBS headquarters, focusing on that issue here. I think having a production hub, as highlighted in paragraph 6, in a multicultural part of Melbourne means local jobs and means local stories. It means local embedded storytelling and really multigenerational pathways for shaping what the stories are that we are telling, how we are telling them and how we are centring Melbourne as a thriving city in this country, as a leading city in this country, in our news and arts and media landscape. I think having a hub would be a fantastic thing, and I think it is incumbent on us as state parliamentarians here, sitting in Melbourne right now, to advocate for such a service. I think it would be quite un-Victorian not to, frankly. We deserve our fair share of representation, in both media and working in production behind the scenes. Looking at point (1)(b) in the motion:

... according to the SBS report, 2023–24, of the 1319 SBS staff, 80 per cent were based in New South Wales, while only 14 per cent were based in Victoria ...

To me that is a concerning figure. We are a huge city in this country. We are a thriving city. I think we have a lot of stories to tell. We have a lot of talent, both on camera – on air – and behind the scenes. I think we should be seeing a much more significant uplift in representation on our government-funded national broadcasters with Melbournians and Victorians being represented in those roles. That figure does concern me, and I do think we should be trying to do what we can to increase our representation there.

When I reflect on a few years prior to entering this Parliament, coming out of a fine arts institution where many of my colleagues now work – some are on camera or in more performative roles, I suppose, and others are working in production, working in a range of different fields, some in news media in different parts of this country, some also abroad – something that I reflect on is when we finishing that degree, the process that you go through of showcasing what you have been working on in those tertiary studies, the skills that you have accrued in that training and honing your craft in whatever form it may be within the arts and production sector, at that time, and I would say this is still the case today, the east coast of this country was predominantly where a lot of the employment opportunities were based coming out of that degree. The particular one I did at the end was based in Perth, and everyone was literally flown over to Melbourne and to Sydney to showcase what had been learned in that institution to different forms of representation, to professionals in those two cities.

Something that was really quite incredible to reflect on is that of the 20 or so of us that were in that cohort graduating, it ultimately became a choice of whether people would settle in either Melbourne or Sydney. Inevitably there is this comparison of what opportunities were based in those locations. As a born and bred Melburnian, I cannot possibly imagine living long term in Sydney – I actually did it for a year back in the day, and it is not something that I could continue to do. Perhaps if you really liked beaches, potentially you could see that pathway, and for colleagues who did ultimately move there, I am convinced that is why they are there, because I cannot imagine any other reason for being there. I think Melbourne has so much to offer.

When we consider what is in this motion today about establishing an SBS hub, what we are reflecting on is having an ongoing, multigenerational production hub and base for employment for that local storytelling in our state. That is where I do think it is incumbent on us to advocate for such a hub, because when you look at, as I believe Mr Welch described it, a centre of gravity being placed in a part of Melbourne, you are having that ongoing employment in a range of different fields through that service. The ripple effect it has across the community is really profound, and where we do see arts and news media organisations continuing over the years in different parts of the country, that is the ripple effect. Having more of those hubs available when I was graduating would have seen more of my colleagues considering Melbourne more strongly as a place in which to base yourself, because ultimately if there are more jobs and opportunities here, that is where those creators, those production staff and administrative staff and other staff will go. We are considering something that is going to have that significant ongoing ripple effect and impact into the future.

This is about whose stories are told, it is about where they are told and it is about embedding that storytelling and that ongoing vision physically in our state. I think it is something that we should be embracing. I think, again, there is going to be argy-bargy over parts of this motion, but ideally we can work through that and hone in on this goal of having that Melbourne-based SBS headquarters. I will leave my contribution there. May the debate continue.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:44): I rise to also add my voice to the team Victoria debate this afternoon, and it is with great enthusiasm that I do so. In August 2023 Mr Davis first moved a motion about this matter in this place. I was due to be the first government speaker, but it was timed out and I never got to give my contribution, so I am very excited to be here today, albeit 22 months later. I am not sure if the urgency is quite as those speakers opposite are leading us to believe. It is a bit of a long wait between motions, but I am grateful to Mr Mulholland for picking up the mantle from Mr Davis on this motion.

I am not so grateful to you for picking up Mr Davis's mantle on housing, but that is another debate. I am grateful to you for picking up the mantle on this motion, because it is an opportunity for us to talk about the creative industries in Victoria, the significant contribution it makes and what is – I will come to some of the details of the motion shortly – in a broad sense, a very good motion in the fact that it highlights, as Mr Puglielli was just referring to as well, the disparity of Victoria's share of both SBS and also ABC jobs in this state. You always are going to have headquarters somewhere, and it is perfectly understandable and reasonable that that particular location will have the larger share. But we

are the fastest growing state in the nation. Indeed I believe Mr Mulholland even referred to us as ‘the thriving state’, which we are. And it is wonderful, as Ms Ermacora said, to see a change in tone from those opposite from constantly running this state down to deciding to put on that navy blue jersey with the big white ‘V’ on it and say, ‘We’re all team Victoria today.’ I am not sure about Mr Limbrick. It was a very interesting contribution by Mr Limbrick. In fact I have to disagree with him. I have spoken to people in the south-east who do very much value and enjoy the SBS. Indeed it provides many programs that are relevant to some of the many multicultural communities in my electorate and I know for members across this chamber as well. It goes to the commentary again from Mr Puglielli that it is part of an ecosystem.

We also have a great range of diverse and new media emerging in our communities, and in particular in our multicultural communities. We could all name many, I am sure, fledgling or in some cases thriving local multicultural media organisations, like the Australian Multicultural Media Centre, and there are many others I could mention just that I have dealt with in my region alone. But bringing the SBS into Victoria does not run counter to that. It would be a great way in fact to support that and provide that work, support that ecosystem and support the continuation of a rich media landscape that we so very much deserve in the state of Victoria.

As I said, I do appreciate Mr Mulholland bringing this motion in today. I think it may perhaps be a bit of a departure for him as well, coming from his old days at the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA). So I am glad to see you have at least come on board for one policy. I think in 2012 they issued a report which was ironically called ‘Be Like Gough’, which recommended breaking up the ABC. Recommendation 1 was to privatise the SBS, which is an outrageous proposition.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Michael GALEA: You were not there then. I am glad to see that you have hopefully turned their minds around too, Mr Mulholland. Now it is up to you to get Mr Limbrick on board. But beyond that, I think the whole chamber can be fully supportive, and I hope you have changed some hearts and minds at the IPA too and extolled to them the virtues of this wonderful organisation, because it is a wonderful organisation. It provides a very unique type of media and entertainment and news and factual information as well to communities that often do not get to have their voices, their stories, represented in the broader mainstream media. Broader mainstream media is definitely improving. If you look at just where we have come in the past 20 years, there has been a great deal of improvement. You might well say there is more to go. But when it comes to the SBS, you have always had a home for multicultural audiences and for those other, shall we say, quirky or unusual tastes as well, which the SBS is always happy to go into that other broadcasters may not. And that is literally how we have seen phenomena in Australia, cultural phenomena such as the Eurovision Song Contest, become such a big deal. It is because of the SBS. And it is a very, very treasured and valuable national institution that we have.

So with the repudiation of those ill-conceived thoughts of the IPA that were – and I will take his comments – before Mr Mulholland’s time there, I hope, from all members opposite, it is good to see a motion in support of both the public broadcaster and public broadcasting jobs being moved to the great state of Victoria. And whether it is Broadmeadows, whether it is Dandenong – I think it should be Dandenong – or whether it is Werribee or anywhere else, we have many, many locations. I am happy to fight Minister Erdogan on that subject, and we could have great debate about that. What a fortunate situation that would be for us to be in. Twenty-two months later, though, I believe the decision is probably finalised now. It may or may not be, but it is nevertheless valiant and worthwhile and an opportunity for us to come together in perhaps agreement today. Perhaps we may have one dissenting voice. We will see.

There are many parts of this motion which are quite reasonable, whether it is point (1), point (2) or point (6). I do note that in Mr Mulholland’s remarks he did talk about the spirit of team Victoria and

hoped that we could come together above politics and above partisanship. It is in that spirit that I would like to now move an amendment which omits paragraph (5).

I move:

1. In paragraph (4), omit 'initiative;' and replace it with 'initiative; and'.
2. Omit all words and expressions in paragraph (5).

Full credit and full marks to Mr Mulholland for having a crack and putting this point across. I would be surprised if he did not use the opportunity to have a bit of a cheeky crack where he could, and I hope he would agree that the simple removal of this one particular paragraph can make the motion a lot more agreeable to and supportable by members if not 100 per cent but fairly broadly supportable across the chamber, and there are some ancillary changes to paragraph (4) too in relation to the word 'and'. But the substantive part of this amendment that I am moving is to remove paragraph (5) and go straight from (4) to (6), because if we are here to be on team Victoria and if we are to support what is, if this amendment is supported, a very good motion today, it is about working together for team Victoria so that we can see some good things happen.

Of course we already see a lot of great things happen in the state of Victoria when it comes to the creative industries. Ms Ermacora referred to the significant amount of support for VicScreen. We had a \$46 million investment in the Docklands Studios provided by this government to really turbocharge the film and TV production that already takes place in this state. Indeed a great deal of movies and TV shows are filmed in Victoria – in Melbourne and in regional Victoria. I have mentioned the Foxtel show *High Country* before. We have also got many movies where Melbourne is used as a backdrop for usually American cities but all around the world. This has become a great and thriving hub.

It is through investments such as you will see this year in the budget papers. Over the forward estimates there is more than \$400 million towards supporting Victoria's creative agencies. There is \$50.2 million over the forward estimates specifically for Victoria's screen economy, an investment made as part of this budget. There are many, many things that we have to be proud of in this state when it comes to the creative industries. Again, not to mention it too much, but it does cover all topics so it makes it easy to reference, but being on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee as well we heard of some of many initiatives and many great things that are happening already in the state of Victoria. That is in very large part, in very significant part, thanks to the investment and the support from the Allan Labor government. I note the interest and passion of Minister Brooks in this space as well in pursuing these opportunities and in making sure that Melbourne and Victoria and all corners of it have these opportunities.

The motion that we have before us today specifically relates to the SBS. With some other members in this place, although I am not a full member of the committee, I did have the opportunity to take part in some of the hearings, including with the SBS, and a few of us were putting that case forward to them. I note again the very significant contribution that they make to all corners of this nation and to our state, whether it is through multicultural media most importantly, whether it is through the NITV services as well supporting our Indigenous committees or whether it is the extensive work that they have been doing and continue to do in the career space too, including at a time when many other media providers were completely absent from that space. We do have a lot to be thankful to the SBS for. It is a terrific organisation, and it can only be more thoroughly improved by having more of its work coming out of the great state of Victoria.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:54): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution on motion 892 in Mr Mulholland's name. This follows the inquiry undertaken by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, the report of which will be tabled in this chamber I think tomorrow. I might be wrong, but it is imminent. The inquiry heard significant evidence. Victoria is Australia's second-largest state. It is its second-largest economy. Melbourne is the largest city. It is the most multicultural city. We are the most diverse state of all the states. SBS should be based in Melbourne, probably in

the north or in the south-east of Melbourne, one or the other, where it can fully reflect the diverse nature of Australia's and Melbourne's population as well.

There is no justification for Australia having two government-funded national broadcasters, both of them based in Sydney and both of them recently moving huge chunks of their economic resources into western Sydney. It is an absolute outrage. We know that these are funded largely by taxpayers and they actually deliver very important outcomes for the community, but one of the important outcomes they deliver is a whole set of linkage jobs – production jobs, back-of-house work – employment and skills for a range of different professionals. For those resources to be concentrated in Sydney, and western Sydney in particular, is an absolute – I am tempted to use a word that I could not use in here – outrage. And the idea that the federal government would actually take the decision to move them there, commit money to moving them there, and to reject any opportunity for Victoria to take part – I mean, I wrote to the SBS inquiry and I –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: You agree with that, do you? You agree that one of them should be based here?

Ryan Batchelor: Your lot want to privatise the SBS and defund the ABC.

David DAVIS: I have never said that. I have always been respectful of both organisations, and I have always been active in ensuring that resources come to Victoria. Taxpayers resources should be spent in a way that reflects the Australian population and not in a way that respects the Sydney population alone. It is just simply absolutely outrageous. And the idea of an 80 per cent spread of resources in Sydney for the SBS and only 14 to 18 per cent here in Melbourne, given the very significant multicultural population here, is just completely and utterly unacceptable.

It is something that I think all Victorians can agree on and all Victorian MPs can agree on, that we should be prepared to campaign and to pressure the federal government, whatever its colour – I do not care what colour it is. The resources should come here. I led a campaign in the 1990s to try and move ABC resources to Melbourne, and I did that because we were, a little bit as outlined by Mr Welch, repeatedly losing more and more to Sydney, and yet here was a government-funded organisation where the same drift to Sydney was occurring. That was actually under a Liberal government, and I was very prepared to go and campaign strongly and say, 'You need to move those resources to Melbourne.' We actually need to have those resources here. It is about the future of our production, it is about the future of artistic activity, it is about the future of a whole range of matters, in this case with SBS, around our multicultural communities.

It is true that decisions are often made by boards that are hopelessly stacked with people from one particular region, and the ABC board has been such a board. The SBS board has not been sufficiently balanced either. Indeed the decision by Michelle Rowland, the then communications minister, to launch an inquiry into moving SBS to western Sydney was simply outrageous. I wrote to her and I wrote to the SBS board and said, 'We need to actually look at this more closely before you head off on this frolic spending public money to further centralise resources for the long haul in Sydney.' This is absolutely nuts and it is something that we have got to stand up against, and I think today in the chamber we are actually beginning to stand up for it. We are beginning to say that enough is enough. The inquiry will have had some effect.

Even if we only move \$10 million of activity to Victoria, that is a huge win. If we move \$50 million worth of activity to Victoria, that is a bigger win. If we move \$500 million worth of spending and activity, that would be a good target for Victoria. Half a billion dollars of money moved from government-funded national broadcasters based in Sydney – a \$500 million move would be the sort of move that would actually start to rebalance it properly and make it fairer. Anyone who knows anything about multiplier effects in economics will know that this is a huge amount of economic

activity, a huge amount of jobs, a huge amount of linkage into production and all of the back-of-house activities and the artistic activities associated with these broadcasters.

Then there is the question of simply who these organisations are reflecting. The SBS charter requires it to reflect the Australian community. How can you reflect Australia's second-largest city, the second-largest population in the state, when you have only 14 per cent of the resources in this state? How can you possibly reflect that? When you look at the diversity of our state and the significance of the concentration in Melbourne and Sydney – those two great cities – of our multicultural populations, the underdone nature of the spending in Victoria becomes a very big problem for this state, and we need to really push back very hard on this.

Mr Mulholland has very successfully and sensibly brought this motion forward. I pay tribute to the inquiry and the work that was done there, and I also pay tribute to Ms Purcell and her work chairing that inquiry. This is a very important set of steps, and we can build a strong bipartisan consensus on this matter in this chamber and actually have a very big influence on the future of Victoria and Melbourne. We need to come together on this, and we need to make it clear it does not matter which colour the government in Canberra is. It does not matter which colour, whether it is Labor and Greens or Labor or Liberals and Nationals in the future, we need to make sure that Victoria is given a commensurate share of the spending and the activity on all levels that reflects its population and reflects, in the case of SBS, the multicultural nature of that population.

I was very pleased that a number of councils have stepped forward on this. Dandenong and Monash both stepped forward, and I know since that time I think Hume have stepped forward and said, 'We would actually be prepared to work with government and find a location and even potentially commit resources to have that reflected properly and to see a move of one of these headquarters to Melbourne and SBS in particular to Melbourne.' More resources here, less resources in western Sydney – more resources here to reflect our community and bolster our economy and the spending and the industry that is so important in Victoria.

I want to just say one thing here. We need to also be very clear with our federal colleagues – both parties, both groups – and say to them, 'Enough is enough. Victoria has had enough of being taken for granted. We have had enough of you tearing the money out of our state and sending only paltry amounts back into this state.' This is actually on a wider front. This is one very important area that we are talking about today with SBS, but it is a broader tendency, a broader trend that has occurred across recent decades of activity in Victoria where we have been funding more and getting less. We have been supporting other mendicant states, and that is the story of the Federation. When I was a minister I got some figures taken out which showed very, very clearly that Victoria is the only state that had been a donor state for every year of the Federation. Every single year we had sent more to Canberra than had returned from Canberra. You ask: how long can that go on for? It is still happening. There has been a recent rebalancing in the GST, that is true, but that is only one stream of funding. Here is another very big stream of funding: hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars on public broadcasting, and we should have our fair share.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:04): I rise to contribute to Mr Mulholland's motion on the Special Broadcasting Service, or SBS, and his proposal to advocate for its move to a Melbourne-based headquarters. It sets out his wish that this chamber express concern to the Commonwealth government over the proposal to relocate the SBS headquarters to western Sydney rather than to suburbs of Melbourne, such as Broadmeadows or Dandenong. The SBS was created by Malcolm Fraser's Liberal government in 1975, but much less known, however, is the history of broadcasting in Australia to multicultural communities and how it evolved over time. The purpose of the SBS was to broadcast news services and bulletins to migrant communities in a variety of languages as more and more people moved to Australia after we ended the White Australia policy. When that was brought to the end by the Holt Liberal and Whitlam Labor governments, attention was drawn to how to accommodate the needs of people who may not fluently speak English, and with that the Commonwealth began forming the strategy.

Initially the broadcasting minister under Gough Whitlam's government executed a trial of limited stations broadcasting in different languages, those stations being 2EA and 3EA in Sydney and Melbourne respectively, especially for migrant communities that did not speak English. This formed the basis of the eventual panel convened by the Fraser government which established the SBS as an early radio network across Australia with the purpose of relaying news and media by air to a multi-ethnic audience. It became one of the two national broadcasters run by the Australian government, alongside the ABC.

As the motion sets out, the SBS has grown quite substantially over the years; it now has 1319 staff, 80 per cent of whom are based in New South Wales while the other 14 per cent are based in Victoria. The motion makes the observation that Victoria is growing, and that is something that I could not agree more with the member on. Victoria is growing, and it is growing fast. By 2051 we will have the same population in Melbourne that London has today, and we are the most diverse city in the country. More and more migrants are coming to Melbourne from all corners of the world and adding to the rich culture of this city and Victoria. Much like Melbourne, Sydney is also booming with activity. Sydney, especially western Sydney, is a much more vibrant and active place, with migrants from all around the world settling in. It is a move that has required a great deal of investment by the government over in New South Wales, whether it be in the redevelopment of Parramatta, the light rail expansion, the Metro or western Sydney airport – you name it.

Just as New South Wales is investing in its west, so is the Allan Labor government. Whether it be the \$4 billion upgrade to the Sunshine transport hub to build a new centre of economic activity for the west or the extension of the rail capacity for the airport rail link, this government has been seriously investing in infrastructure and economic activity for the west. I think this is where the key difference is: migrant communities care about economic investment and development, because in the end that is what helps their material standards – a train to the airport, more frequent trains, more economic development and opportunities to get ahead. Headquartering the SBS in Melbourne would be a nice idea, but this motion is not about making a substantial difference to multicultural communities in these fields, it is just about making a statement. It is a grasp at straws, because the hard reality is that these communities are being supported by the Allan Labor government. What is the groundbreaking policy shift those opposite are suggesting? Is it to build more roads, to build capacity for more rail services or to build more homes here? The answer is no. They are all about their main issue, which is that SBS will be headquartered in western Sydney instead of Melbourne.

The motion says that there is a lost opportunity on a production hub. This is a false outrage. Just a few months ago those opposite stood with the then leader of the federal opposition Peter Dutton and with straight faces tried to explain how ripping \$500 million from the Sunshine to airport rail project would actually be in the best interests of Melbourne. The Sunshine superhub is an opportunity to invest in the western suburbs, and it is a game changer for multicultural communities in Melbourne. A snapshot of the area conducted by Brimbank council showed that around 48.2 per cent of people in their council were born overseas. Of these migrants, the most common was –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, Mr President, on relevance, I am not sure what rail services have to do with the SBS motion.

The PRESIDENT: Actually I was going to interrupt rather than rule on the point of order, if you do not mind. I was going to interrupt Mr Berger, because I think it is an opportune time to give you a right of reply so we can get a vote in.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:59): Okay. Fair enough. I am happy to sum up. Can I thank everyone sincerely for their contributions. I think it is always good and notable to have motions like this where we can all agree, motions like this where everyone can be on the one page and where everyone can speak with one voice as a Legislative Council. Hopefully this passes with unanimous support. Then I will – but hopefully the minister will, write to the new federal Minister for Communications with the resolution of this chamber attached, having full agreement, to indicate that

it is the view of the Victorian Legislative Council, both government and opposition and minor parties, that SBS have a presence in Victoria. I am not quite sure what Ms Ermacora was getting at by saying that SBS values are Labor values, or Labor values are SBS values or something like that, and that we did not support SBS, which is not true – SBS was created under a Liberal government, under Malcolm Fraser. Mr Davis went on to make a contribution about how influential Petro Georgiou was in that.

I would like to thank Mr Puglielli for his contribution and support and also to thank Mr Galea for his contribution. I know he genuinely takes a big interest in this and has a longstanding interest. He does not oppose motions like this – he supports them – which is very good of him. I thank him for his amendment. I thought that in the spirit of bipartisanship we would remove that amendment. Nonetheless, it is true. We have gone from condemning the Albanese Labor government to expressing concern at the Albanese Labor government, which is a polite way of putting things, but it is true. And to be honest, if it had been a Liberal government that made that decision, I think we would be in exactly the same place here. That sends a really powerful message as a chamber to the federal government on behalf of our multicultural communities and on behalf of our production sector, our arts sector; we would like to do that as well. I would be very keen to come back to this chamber about potential tariffs on our creative sector, on our film sector, tariffs that were threatened on our arts community and also move a motion condemning that because that is something that is causing a great amount of angst in our production sector.

Mr Welch and Mr Davis had some good points about the ABC for years and years, in dribs and drabs, moving staff to Sydney. It was interesting that in response to questions about moving to Parramatta the ABC said they could not possibly move to a presence in Victoria because of industrial relations settings, but they could, over years, over decades, move thousands to Sydney from Melbourne. I guess industrial relations did not have anything to do with it in the first place.

I would like to thank everyone for their support on this motion. It is a very important motion. It does send a message that if you live in an area like Broadmeadows or Dandenong, if you come from a migrant background, if you were born overseas or you have got a parent that was born overseas or a grandparent that was born overseas, Victorian members of Parliament want you to feel connected to your community, want SBS to be located in your community and want to see you employed in your community with the jobs that would create. I commend this motion to the house.

Amendment agreed to; amended motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:14): 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

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (17:14): I have a message from the Governor, dated 18 June:

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

20/2025 Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Act 2025

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board***Report 2023–24*

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:14): I rise to speak on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board annual report for the 2023–24 financial year. This is the third annual report from the independent board responsible for monitoring the operation of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017, the legislation that made Victoria the first jurisdiction in Australia to legalise voluntary assisted dying. Since the law came into effect in 2019 it has offered terminally ill Victorians a compassionate and dignified end-of-life choice grounded in autonomy and humanity. The Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board annual report demonstrates that voluntary assisted dying continues to operate safely and effectively. Over the past year there has been a 22 per cent increase in self-administered permits and a 35 per cent increase in practitioner administration permits, and voluntary assisted dying accounted for 0.84 per cent of all deaths in Victoria. Despite this growth, our rates remain among the lowest in the country in part because practitioner administration is currently limited to those physically unable to self-administer.

Importantly, the program is being accessed alongside palliative care and is widely supported by the Victorian community, findings echoed in the independent five-year review of the act tabled by the Minister for Health, Mary-Anne Thomas, in February. The Allan Labor government has accepted all recommendations from that independent review and will now pursue further reforms to make voluntary assisted dying more accessible, equitable and sustainable. These include legislative changes to allow health practitioners to initiate discussions about voluntary assisted dying, something that is currently not allowed, but it is recognising that the current restrictions limit informed decision-making and hinder honest conversations about end-of-life care. The review also recommends requiring health practitioners with a conscientious objection to at least provide minimum information to patients. The current lack of obligation contributes to confusion, distress and obstruction, particularly in rural or aged care settings. The Labor government has committed to consulting with stakeholders on these changes to ensure that they reflect the principles of person-centred care.

Other proposed reforms include reducing administrative burdens on applicants with neurodegenerative conditions, including the removal of a third assessment, which will ease the process for people who are often housebound or bedbound and reduce pressure on the small cohort of trained practitioners. This leads me to a key finding of the VAD review board annual report. Just 161 practitioners participated in voluntary assisted dying cases last year, and only 10 managed more than half of all those cases. Just three of them were in rural or regional Victoria. This highlights the urgent need for expanded training and support to ensure statewide access and the sustainability of the program over the long term. The report also draws attention to delays in access, with 180 applicants dying before their permits were issued. This really is a tragedy. These numbers are not just statistics, they are moments lost to unnecessary suffering.

As legislators we must respond with urgency and compassion. Whilst the board itself does not deliver services, government-funded infrastructure remains essential. The statewide care navigator service and the statewide pharmacy service, both of which saw increased demand this year, continue to support patients and families at an extraordinarily vulnerable time with professionalism, dignity and empathy. The board's compliance and oversight work remains rigorous, with 68 safeguards in place. In 2023–24 just 10 cases were found to be noncompliant, primarily due to administrative oversights and not safety breaches. The enhanced voluntary assisted dying portal and regular auditing processes are key examples of how we continue to refine the system to meet community needs.

Finally, the review, alongside the board, urges the Victorian government to continue advocating to the Commonwealth for reform to telehealth restrictions that currently prohibit doctors from conducting VAD consultations online. These laws place unnecessary and often cruel burdens on people in remote areas or with limited mobility. Since 2019, 1282 Victorians have accessed voluntary assisted dying

under our laws, and behind each number is a story, a person, a family, a decision made with courage and clarity. In speaking to this report I commend the Allan Labor government for its commitment to implementing recommendations of both the review board and the independent review. I also urge colleagues across this chamber to approach any coming legislative reforms with compassion, pragmatism and unwavering commitment to dignity at the end of life. I commend the report to the house.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:19): I rise to speak on the state budget 2025–26, and it raises the budget for the housing portfolio. What I want to speak about is the failure of this government when it comes to waiting lists for the housing portfolio. We have seen the public housing waiting list rise since December 2014, when there were 34,320 families on it – and I know I was the minister at the time. I actually reduced that from the 41,212 that I inherited, but I still felt 34,320 families waiting for a home in Victoria was way too many. Unfortunately, under this government, we have seen a 61 per cent increase in that list – up to 55,553 families are now waiting for housing. And I am being a little bit generous here; I am not including the transfer list, which would take it to 66,117, because those families are already housed even though they may be inappropriately housed or need to be moved for medical reasons.

The real shock comes when you look at priority housing. Priority housing is for people who are homeless or at risk of recurring homelessness, people who are escaping domestic violence, people who are living with a disability and people who have special housing needs. This list has increased from 9625 families in December 2014 to now 30,209 families. These are the most vulnerable families in Victoria, and there are 30,209 of them languishing on this waiting list – a 213.8 per cent increase under this government, but this government does not care.

The figures get worse when you look at regional Victoria. In my area in the Loddon area there were 1089 families on the waiting list in 2014. That is now 7238, which is a 564 per cent increase. For early housing, the priority housing for those who are most vulnerable, there were 354 in 2014. There are now 4542 families – a 1183 per cent increase. In the Mallee region there were 707 families on the total waiting list, and there are now 2733 – a 286 per cent increase. For priority housing there were 188 families in 2014. In March 2025 there were 1539 families – that is a 718 per cent increase. In the Goulburn region, which includes Shepparton, there were 745 families on the waiting list in 2014. That is now 4487 – a 502 per cent increase. There were 159 families seeking priority housing in 2014. There are now 2716 – a 1608 per cent increase. And in the Ovens Murray area in 2014 there were 807 families on the total waitlist. That is now 3415 families – a 323 per cent increase. The real shock here is once again the list for priority housing applicants, which has risen from 185 in 2014 to now 2100 families in 2025 – a 1035 per cent increase.

What we can see from this is the government is completely failing when it comes to housing the most vulnerable people in the state and that it particularly gets worse in regional areas. The government just do not see beyond the edge of Melbourne. They do not care about regional areas. They are failing our farmers when it comes to drought support. They are failing our farmers when it comes to the emergency services tax. And they are failing the most vulnerable families in regional communities – people escaping domestic violence, people who are homeless or at risk of recurring homelessness, those with special housing needs, those living with a disability. These people, these families, are languishing on the public housing waiting list, and this government does not care.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:24): I rise to speak on the Victorian state budget 2025–26, or the entire budget really, but in particular budget paper 3 and budget paper 4, which

cover the service delivery and the state capital program, especially in the field of transport. Before long, this year people will be lining up for the opening of the Metro Tunnel. The lines will be longer, I dare say, even than the lines to buy a new Labubu. But when the Metro Tunnel opens this year it is going to be fantastic to see the Pakenham and Cranbourne lines united with the Sunbury line, providing a new cross-city corridor through the city. We are, in a very short space of time – in fact this Saturday – going to see some more trial run services for the Metro Tunnel operations just this very weekend. We are going to see trains running through the tunnel, taking passengers off at Caulfield or I believe Footscray at the other end, and then continuing to run through to simulate more real-life train operations – one closer step to activating the Metro Tunnel, to operationalising and switching on a very significant piece of state infrastructure. It is a piece of state infrastructure that has been solely funded by the state government, because of course we got absolutely zero support from the federal Liberal government, who continued to neglect Victoria throughout its entire nine years in office, giving us less than 10 per cent of the national infrastructure spend despite us having more than 25 per cent of the national population. Thankfully, we now have a Prime Minister who is from Sydney but is not for Sydney, who is for Victoria just as much as he is for the rest of the country, and we see that with the continued infrastructure investment. I see my colleagues Dr Heath and Ms Bath, and I am sure that quietly they know that to be true as well. They know that to be true – that their federal colleagues were leaving Victoria behind for the nine years of their rotten and ineffective government.

Unlike that government, we do have a government now that does support Victorian infrastructure projects, that has supported and committed more than \$2 billion for the Suburban Rail Loop, another project which features heavily in budget paper 4. I know those opposite like to dismiss that as some sort of insignificant figure, but it is a very significant figure, a very significant commitment to the people of Victoria that their colleagues across the aisle just do not seem to care about. The fact that they keep losing seats in Victoria, maybe that has something to do with the fact that they will not do anything for Victoria. Maybe they will work that out one day. But in the meantime, how good is it that we have a federal Labor government that knows where Victoria is on a map and that continues to provide that investment.

We will have in 10 years time the new Suburban Rail Loop connecting communities not just in the south-east and the east but indeed providing that connectivity for people all over Melbourne and all over Victoria too. If you are coming from Gippsland to access the jobs hubs or the universities, if you live in the western suburbs, if you live around Sunshine, you will be able to get the train straight through to Clayton and change for the SRL straight to Monash. Opening up these opportunities, with the agglomeration effects that this will open up for all Victorians, is a huge and significant investment. Indeed we saw discussion in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week in relation to service upgrades as well. There will be significant service upgrades as part of the new Metro Tunnel. I know Mr Batchelor is very excited about the Sandringham line, which is getting dramatically increased services as well.

Sheena Watt interjected.

Michael GALEA: And indeed Ms Watt is keen to point out the Upfield and Craigieburn lines are getting further services as well, as indeed will the west and the south-east on the Metro Tunnel itself. But it is not just trains, of course, it is also about those very important things such as bus services. Whether you live in Aintree or Rockbank, which are getting new bus services, improved bus services that will connect you both to your local station but also to the Sunbury line for the Metro Tunnel; whether you are in the south-east with the continuation of the extended routes; or whether it is the new route 798 in Clyde North or route 831 coming out very shortly as well; in every corner of the state we are investing in public transport projects so that we can deliver and invest in the public transport services using that infrastructure.

I know sometimes the Liberal members get a bit confused about the operationalisation of these projects, and yes, you do not build projects and not run services. As the Premier said, you do not open a pub and not serve beer, and it is exactly the same with these projects. All Victorians, I am sure, will

be getting behind them, and the fervour and excitement will be even greater than the excitement for the Labubus, as I said. There are some great projects opening very soon.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2025–26

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:29): I will actually speak on the budget in my contribution today. It will be on budget paper 3, and it is in relation to fire and emergency management output. Just to note, the government in the previous three financial years spent an average of \$604 million on fire and emergency management – \$600 million. This year in the budget the same line item has \$400 million, and it is actually down considerably from the previous year.

When the Minister for Environment was asked about this at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry, his comment was ‘The figures are lumpy’. They are lumpy figures. There are a lot of things that can be lumpy: it can be my cooking from time to time, it can be a bed from time to time, but I would not have thought it would be the budget figures for a known service. We have a known landmass. We have a known area of forest. We have been doing fuel reduction burns. Victoria has been doing bushfire firebreaks for a long, long time. In the previous three years it was \$600 million annually. This year it is \$400 million, and the minister says, ‘Look, it’s lumpy.’ Then he said, ‘Why don’t you go and have a conversation with Forest Fire Management Victoria officer Chris Hardman, and he will explain.’ Well, Chris Hardman is a very knowledgeable person and does an amazing job – all hands to him. But the government should not be having a budget that is ‘lumpy’ in respect to keeping Victorians safe – a lumpy budget.

The minister also said, ‘It’s okay, we’ll use the Treasurer’s advance. It’s okay. We can go into the Treasurer’s advance, and we’ll tap into that.’ They can borrow some of that money and not pay it back to the Victorian taxpayer, because it is not allocated in the budget already. But they will go in and use the Treasurer’s advance. The Treasurer’s advance, as we all know, is a limited pool, supposedly, and it is for unforeseen circumstances or emergencies – natural disasters and the like. We saw it used during COVID. We saw it last year for the Suburban Rail Loop. They have dipped into the pocket of the Treasurer’s advance for the SRL. I do not think that is a natural emergency – it might be an emergency down the track when somebody has got to pay for it. They dipped into the Treasurer’s advance for the Commonwealth Games bailout. That is not an emergency. Natural disasters, fire and storm – okay. That is what they are doing. And yet we have the very level of government that is keeping Victorians safe, protecting regional and rural communities and looking after the bush saying, ‘It’s a bit lumpy,’ and ‘We’ll add it on later by going to the Treasurer.’ And not only that, but he said that they were going to get FFMV, Forest Fire Management Victoria, to go cap in hand to the Treasurer to ask for some money.

What has happened in recent times has been the government’s flawed policy around Safer Together. It trashed the bushfire royal commission’s 5 per cent rolling target of treatable land. It threw it out and said, ‘No, no. We’ll come up with a really much better policy.’ Virtually no sane person, even some of the people that wrote it, agree with it now, the Safer Together policy. The government has not met its benchmarks. It has not met its Safer Together residual risk in many places. It has not met it in the metropolitan district. You people in Melbourne – you have not met it. It has not met it in the Yarra district, in Gippsland. It has not met it in Latrobe Valley, and it certainly had not met it in the Grampians up until the fires. But now what does the government do? The government then puts that whole mass area of fires that have occurred in the Grampians over the summer in. It will consider that a reduction, a bushfire mitigation. It actually incorporates it into its own Safer Together. So we have to have out-of-control bushfires in order for this government to say it is meeting its own flawed target. Minister, you inherited this policy. I ask you, I implore you, to ditch Safer Together and do some proper residual burns.

Melbourne Polytechnic*Report 2024*

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:34): I rise today to speak on the annual report from 2024 of Melbourne Polytechnic, one of Victoria's leading TAFE institutions based in the Northern Metropolitan Region. I am here to highlight its pivotal role in preparing Victorians for the clean energy jobs of the future. This report is a testament to the power of public education – a story of transformation, opportunity and ambition. In 2024 alone over 21,000 students were enrolled across 289 courses, with 85 per cent reporting that they had achieved or were on the way to achieving their learning goals. That is more than just a number; it is a demonstration of our high-quality, accessible education – well, it changes lives. The Albanese and Allan Labor governments understand that education and skills are the keys to opportunity, and that is why we are delivering free TAFE for all Australians, removing financial barriers so that people can get the skills they need for secure in-demand jobs. Whether you are a school leaver, a career changer or someone returning to the workforce, free TAFE is opening doors for thousands of Victorians, especially in sectors critical to our state's future. Nowhere is this more evident than the renewable energy economy, where it is in fact one of the fastest growing areas. And Melbourne Polytechnic are leading the charge in training the next generation of electricians, engineers, plumbers and builders, who will design, construct and maintain the infrastructure that powers Victoria's net zero future.

In 2024 polytechnic was selected to lead two clean economy skills labs. One was focused on residential building and construction and the other on circular design and manufacturing. These labs were hands-on, industry driven and targeted at the real skills gap we need to fill to transition our economy. In another milestone, the Heidelberg campus across the way in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region will soon become host to Victoria's first future of housing construction centre of excellence, backed by \$50 million from the Albanese and Allan Labor governments. It is going to train students in modern, sustainable and prefabricated construction methods to help deliver the 1.2 million homes that our nation needs.

Our investment in skills and TAFE is not just about economic productivity, it is about fairness and it is about inclusion. Melbourne Polytechnic's programs actively support women in trades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, new migrants and refugees. They are creating genuine pathways into work, not just training for training's sake. We see this through inspirational stories, like that of Kulwant Singh, who arrived in Melbourne with overseas qualifications but right now is thriving in the construction industry thanks to a certificate III in waterproofing, or students like Alexandra Brearley, who was named the veterinarian nurse of the year and has already become a mentor and leader in her field.

Melbourne Polytechnic are also walking the talk on climate, and its Collingwood campus in 2024 became Victoria's first all-electric TAFE. Designed with accessibility, sustainability and innovation at its core, the institute will also progress towards a net zero future by 2040 – the most ambitious of any TAFE in Victoria – so here's to Melbourne Polytechnic. This is what public TAFE looks like under a Labor government: bold, inclusive, community driven and future focused. And because of free TAFE, because of Labor's investment and because of institutions like Melbourne Polytechnic, Victoria is ready for the clean energy jobs of the future. And we are not just training people for work, we are building a workforce that will power our hospitals, our homes and our communities with renewable jobs. The road to net zero runs right through public TAFE, and thanks to Melbourne Polytechnic and Labor governments we are on track to build a skilled, sustainable and inclusive future that our state needs. Can I take a moment to commend the leadership of Melbourne Polytechnic for your deep commitment not only to student success but to a cleaner, fairer future for all Victorians.

Department of Health*Review of the Operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017*

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to speak on the review of the operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 (VAD act), published in October 2024. I rise to give voice to profound concerns shared by representatives of over 2 million Victorians as articulated in a very powerful submission from Victorian faith leaders, including the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, the Board of Imams Victoria, the Hindu Council of Australia, Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria, Sikh Gurdwara council, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, the Chaldean diocese of Australia, the Syro Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle, the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne, the Maronite eparchy of Australia and many others.

These communities provide invaluable care which spans over 130 years in our hospitals, aged care facilities and social services and is driven by a commitment to holistic care for the most vulnerable. Their submission highlights a deeply flawed consultation process regarding the proposed changes to the VAD act. These amendments were not recommended by the five-year review of the act. Indeed the government explicitly stated the review would not consider legislative changes. Yet here we are with vague proposals, rushed consultation and a distinct lack of transparency. I have been pleased to undertake discussions with all of these communities and thank them for their willingness to articulate this Labor government policy to their communities as we go on with this important debate.

All parties, whether proponents of voluntary assisted dying (VAD) or not, deserve to know how these changes will be legislated given the sensitivities and strongly held views on matters of life and death. Proper, thorough public consideration and consultation are absolutely essential given this gravity. Many of the proposed changes were deeply explored by this Parliament and rejected. When the legislation first came to pass a few years ago, it was heralded by the Labor government at the time as the safest in the world with 68 safeguards, safeguards which this government is now trying to rush through and redefine as access issues. Safeguards, by their nature, curtail access. The responsibility is on this government to carefully explain, in consultation with Victorians, what has changed from a clinical perspective rather than an ideological one to warrant such amendments.

Many of the proposed changes would critically weaken protections for vulnerable Victorians. This is particularly concerning when many barriers already exist in accessing palliative and normal end-of-life care services in Victoria, particularly for patients and residents who have complex needs, are based in rural or regional areas or are experiencing significant vulnerabilities. Data also shows that feeling like a burden is a key reason for seeking VAD measures. These amendments thus have the potential to make VAD more accessible than normal end-of-life care services. The environment such a situation creates is inherently coercive.

Let me be clear: VAD is not health care, and forcing conscientious objectors to violate their beliefs is an affront to deeply held principles. It goes against all advice to date. The current VAD act states that all persons, including health practitioners, have the right to be shown respect for their culture, beliefs, values and personal characteristics. The final report of the early inquiry into end-of-life choices strongly recommended that health services, as well as individual health practitioners, not be forced to participate in assisted dying.

VAD is a complex area. It requires sensitivity rather than interjections, and a blunt approach without consultation, which requires all health care professionals to provide minimum information, could also give rise to the risk that inappropriately trained health professionals could end up providing incomplete or inaccurate information, such as shortening time between requests or reducing safeguards. I say to the Minister for Health: publish an exposure draft of the changes and allow for public consideration as demanded by faith leaders or, frankly, abandon this legislation completely.

Petitions

Barry Beach marine terminal

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:44): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

I want to start by thanking the Gippsland community and Friends of the Earth for bringing this petition and the issue it represents to the attention of our Parliament. This community has been on the front line of many decisions made by our government when it comes to offshore oil and gas, and they have been fierce defenders of our precious marine and coastal systems. I want to thank them for not giving up on the fight to protect our environment and our climate. Last year I stood in this chamber and raised concerns emerging from the community about how to decommission fossil fuel infrastructure at the end of its life and how fossil fuel companies are inevitably shirking their environmental responsibilities, focusing instead on whatever is cheapest and easiest. I was proud that members of this Council listened to those community concerns and voted in favour of the Greens' inquiry, which will take place next year.

Across Victoria's coast there are estimated to be around 400 rusty old oil–gas wells in need of decommissioning, and now 13 of these rigs previously operated by Exxon Mobil are the subject of this petition. Exxon Mobil is proposing to construct an onshore reception centre at Barry Beach terminal in order to decommission up to 13 rigs currently situated in the Gippsland Basin. These rigs are the first of their kind to be decommissioned in Australia. At the outset, what is essential here is that the right precedent is set so that the hundreds of other wells to be decommissioned over the coming decade are properly handled and recycled and that local procurement and a just transition for the industry is at the forefront of this planning.

Unfortunately, Exxon Mobil's environmental and industrial track record in the Bass Strait is problematic. Three hydrocarbon spills were reported in 2024 alone. The Gippsland Basin rigs are in a dangerous state of disrepair, putting workers at risk. Routine inspection protocols have been neglected, and employees reporting mental and physical fatigue have been ignored. Exxon Mobil's decommissioning proposal involves transporting 60,000 tonnes of material via barges through the Corner Inlet shipping channel to a new reception centre at Barry Beach marine terminal. Here they will be stored for years to be dismantled and then transported elsewhere for recycling or disposal.

But Corner Inlet is not just a shipping channel; it is a Ramsar-listed wetland. Not only is it the southernmost tidal mudflat system on mainland Australia with the southernmost occurrence of white mangrove in the world, it actually contains the most extensive system of intertidal mudflats in Victoria, making it a haven for migratory shorebirds. Over the cool months 50 per cent of the overwintering population of migratory wader species can be found at Corner Inlet. For twitchers that is a very exciting statistic, but for the broader community it demonstrates that this is a special habitat in need of serious protection.

Concerns have also been raised about Exxon's construction and use of the reception centre at Barry Beach. Locals have highlighted contamination concerns, pointing to a 2018 EPA audit of lands adjacent to the terminal which found that the company had contaminated groundwater with hydrocarbons to the point that it was considered unsuitable for potable water supply, water-based recreation or stock watering. The terminal's operator has also conceded the likelihood of marine sediment contamination following spillages and the use of anti-fouling paint in the port. So whilst at face value the proposal by Exxon to decommission its rigs in the middle of this site may appear uncontroversial, there are serious risks that need to be properly scrutinised. And so the community's request is a simple one: that the Minister for Planning commission an environment effects statement into Exxon Mobil's plans and ensure that the EES process involves a period of public consultation, recognising that any decommissioning activity undertaken in Victoria must reflect international best practice.

Decommissioning of these rigs is no small task. Exxon have anticipated there will be 20 barge movements in and out of Corner Inlet over a four-month period, after which they will be stored onshore for years while they are broken down and sorted. It would then take a significant number of trucks travelling through isolated farmland in South Gippsland to establish a recycling facility for the remaining material to be disposed of.

There is lots more to say about the risks of moving this material, the risk to the Ramsar site and all the different types of materials and hazardous waste that will be removed. But suffice to say decommissioning requires serious scrutiny and oversight. I commend this petition to the house.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:49): I rise to speak on this petition sponsored by Dr Mansfield. I want to acknowledge all those that have signed the petition to participate in the democratic process here in the Legislative Council. It is an important and topical issue. I do not have a lot of time, but I just want to address how environment effects statements work. The environment effects statement, the EES, process is the highest level of environmental assessment in Victoria. Proponents and stakeholders invest heavily in an EES and should be confident that processes and principles are applied consistently and transparently. A project is referred by a proponent or decision-maker in accordance with the referral criteria. The minister will make one of three decisions, normally within 20 business days of effecting a referral. If it is yes, an EES is required and approval decisions are put on hold until the EES process is completed. If it is no, an EES is not required and decision-makers can proceed with their approval process; or alternatively an EES is not required but conditions must be met, and conditions might relate to the location or dimensions of the project, mitigation measures or alternative requirements for further studies or consultation.

The matters to be investigated and documented in an EES are set out in the scoping requirements issued by the minister. These are different for each project and depend on the associated environmental risks. Draft scoping requirements are prepared following input from the proponent and other agencies. These are released for public comment for at least 15 business days before the final scoping requirements are published. The proponent must prepare a quality EES as well as a study program and consultation plan consistent with the scoping requirements. A technical reference group with members from government agencies, local government or statutory authorities is appointed to provide advice to the proponent and the department during the preparation of the EES. When the EES is deemed suitable, it is released for public comment for between 20 and 30 business days. During this time the public can make written submissions. The minister may appoint an inquiry to evaluate the effects of the project, having regard to the EES studies and the public submissions. The inquiry may take one of three forms, depending on how complex the issues are, whether that being a desktop review of written submissions, a conference of submitters and review of submissions or a formal hearing where the proponent and submitters can speak and present expert witnesses.

Regarding the Barry Beach marine terminal, Esso Australia have been given a general direction from the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) to commence removal of decommissioned assets – that is, oil and gas platforms and associated infrastructure – from their petroleum leases in the Bass Strait by September 2027. The assets are located in Commonwealth waters. Esso have commenced discussion with Victorian and Commonwealth governments about the required assessment and approval pathways for the project, including the potential referral of the project under the Victorian Environment Effects Act 1978 and the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, the EPBC act. Within the Victorian jurisdiction the project involves upgrades to Barry Beach marine terminal stage 1, the transport of decommissioned assets to Barry Beach marine terminal and offload and storage of the assets at Barry Beach marine terminal, and stage 2, which is the dismantling and decontamination of the assets for disposal and/or recycling or reuse.

Esso Australia have approached the Department of Transport and Planning, DTP, to discuss a staged approach to the consideration of the environmental impacts of their project as the timing for the

upgrade of Barry Beach marine terminal needs to commence construction by quarter 1 of 2026 in order for Esso to meet their obligations under NOPSEMA's general direction.

Qube Energy separately referred their Gippsland regional port project focused on the redevelopment of Barry Beach marine terminal. In 2020 the Minister for Planning decided that an EES is required for the project. The project was placed on hold while the proponent considered the project and waited for further commercial information from potential customers. Stage 1 of the project has been referred under the EPBC act and is on hold while a proponent responds to a request for further information from the Commonwealth. DTP are awaiting further information from Esso Australia about the project and its impacts, and on receipt the department will continue to engage with Esso about the necessary assessment and approvals process for their project.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:54): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution the petition put forward by Dr Mansfield today. I did have a look at some of the petition signees, and I noticed that as well as many people from the Gippsland region there were many Melburnians signing that petition as well. I am someone who knows Barry Beach and Port Anthony very well. In fact I was only down there 12 months ago on the request of Qube to have a look around and to investigate the work that Qube is doing in order to get in readiness for the potential, the opportunity, of the offshore wind industry and some of the very exciting developments for that region – and jobs as well as a renewable energy source into the future.

Barry Beach terminal was certainly established 50 years ago, and when I was at school many of the young people at my school actually went on to do a trade out there. It was part of the whole industry, and indeed it serviced that industry. At the time it was actually part of the construction and therefore, then and after, part of the maintenance of the oil and gas industry from that spot. Over that time there have been literally thousands and thousands of tonnes of whether it be food or supplies or fuel or equipment to the offshore platforms and installations. It has, by context, both a historic and a current and a potential future use. The oil and gas industry is winding down out in Bass Strait, and indeed part of that is going to need to be the decommissioning site.

We had a look, and there was a discussion around the various pieces of infrastructure that need to occur for the decommissioning and the care and thought around that and the planning that is occurring. Surely that must get a nod from the Greens for a renewable industry. I did ask, when I was out there, about the Ramsar convention and the Ramsar wetlands and where they were in relation to the terminal. We certainly had a discussion about how the Ramsar convention talks about the wise use of wetlands keeping in balance the requirements of sustainable development. I also know that Gippsland Lakes, Western Port and Port Phillip – 12 Ramsar wetlands occur in Victoria and are identified in Victoria, and many of the lakes actually have coexistence with other industry. However, people are right to be concerned, and the nub of this petition is around the decommissioning and the importance of making sure that regulation and acts are adhered to and then the safeguards and the rigour around those.

We have got state legislation and federal legislation, and Mr McIntosh went through that in quite some detail. But certainly there are a number of acts and indeed regulations that are required. The regulator is the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environment Management Authority, and there is also the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. What Gippslanders want to know, what environmentalists want to know – and they can be one and the same people – and what careful-thinking people and the industry want to know is that these will be decommissioned safely and removed safely to enable the facilitation of the future.

The environment effects statement can occur. The proponent has criteria. They have said that it is not required, that it does not meet the threshold for the criteria. But the key factor here is that the minister has the opportunity to call it in. If the minister thinks that it is dangerous enough, is concerned enough, they can call it in. What I do find quite obtuse and what is a frustration for other Gippslanders in my electorate is that there is the Delburn wind farm, and that has been on the books now for five or six years. Indeed there was an EES proposed. It did trigger an EES. It is over forest – 33 wind turbines

over plantation, over forest. There was a trigger. It was supposed to go to an EES. What happened? The minister actually called that in and said, ‘No, we’re not going to bother doing an EES.’ So on one hand we have got the Greens very concerned, and rightly so, but there is safety and rigour around that. And then we have got another concern – we have got the government shutting down an EES. The government needs to back in its legislation and back in safety. I thank Dr Mansfield for the opportunity to have this conversation.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:59): I thank my colleagues in this place for their contributions. I think Mr McIntosh, in outlining the triggers for and the stages involved in an environment effects statement, made a very good case for why that is exactly the process we need in this instance. Nine per cent of the material to be decommissioned nationally is in the Gippsland Basin. If stringent standards for decommissioning are not established right now in this process, it will set a very dangerous precedent for the rest of the country. Decommissioning retired infrastructure requires investment with no return for private companies such as ExxonMobil, who will naturally attempt to minimise expenses. Considering their history both globally and in Australia, it is not unreasonable to question whether they would sacrifice the environment for the benefit of shareholder returns. Allowing the plans to continue without an environment effects statement is irresponsible, and I commend the petition to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:00): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Early childhood education and care

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): (1718) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is for the minister to outline how the Allan Labor government will continue to support the expansion of early childhood education infrastructure in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, ensuring more local families can access high-quality kindergarten close to home. I raise this matter following the official opening of the newly upgraded kindergarten room at Heatherdale Preschool in Mitcham, an inspiring example of Labor’s commitment to delivering universal access to early education. Thanks to \$1.208 million from the 2021–22 Building Blocks capacity grant, Heatherdale now offers an additional 22 places, bringing total enrolments capacity to 83 places. It was also the first kinder in the area to offer a three-year-old kindergarten program. This investment demonstrates the values of the Labor government in action, removing barriers to education, supporting working families and giving every child every chance, regardless of background, and the best start in life. The co-location of kindergartens near schools eases the transition to primary education and helps busy parents manage the daily juggle of work, care and study. Through our Best Start, Best Life reforms the Allan Labor government is investing not only in bricks and mortar but also in social equity, lifelong opportunity and cost-of-living relief, saving families up to \$2600 per child through the free kinder initiative. This is a proud achievement for Mitcham, but we know the demand for high-quality early learning continues to grow. I therefore ask the minister to advise how our government will continue this momentum and ensure every child across the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region has the opportunity to thrive through strong early learning infrastructure.

Public broadcasters

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:02): (1719) I want to raise a matter, which follows on from the debate that we just had now, for the Minister for Creative Industries. We are very pleased that the chamber has wholeheartedly passed a motion I think with unanimous support to see the SBS brought to Victoria out of Western Sydney and to see resources moved here from these national broadcasters, which are funded largely by taxpayers money. They are very important matters for

creative industries, for the production sector and for the whole range of linkage industries. What I would seek for the Minister for Creative Industries to do is to every year publish a summary of the staffing and spending by the two government-funded national broadcasters – that is, the ABC and the SBS – and to table in both houses of this Parliament a short report that looks at the spending by those organisations and the resources provided to the organisations geographically, the head office functions, the commissioning of a range of production and the linkage industries and the jobs created in particular sectors in Melbourne and in Victoria.

This would be a constructive monitoring of the national bodies, these government-funded national broadcasters which are funded by taxpayers money. In the case of SBS, as we have heard today, 80 per cent of their staff are located in Sydney, now many in Western Sydney, and only 14 to 18 per cent are located in Victoria – that is, in Melbourne. I think by monitoring this the Minister for Creative Industries could successfully keep some pressure on this matter. It would be a small research task for his department and then the publication, perhaps by leave, of a short report each year. I think this would be something that could also be sent to the federal communications minister and to those two organisations and could obviously have some public release that would year by year track the spending of national money and Victoria's share. It has been paltry, it has been inadequate and we need to keep up political pressure on governments of whatever colour at a national level to ensure that we are not short-changed. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars worth of jobs, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of linkage.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:05): (1720) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek from the minister is that she publish a list of community-led organisations specialising in refugee support that received funding in both the 2024–25 and 2025–26 budgets.

Victoria receives around one-third of all refugees and people seeking asylum entering Australia, more than any other state or territory. In 2024 over 6600 refugees settled in Victoria, and an estimated 11,000 to 20,000 people seeking asylum live in our communities on bridging visas while awaiting decisions on their claims. As these numbers grow so too does the demand for culturally responsive community-based services – services that only grassroots organisations can provide with authenticity, trust and local knowledge. Community organisations play a vital role in delivering refugee services. These community-led organisations provide culturally appropriate, trusted and accessible support to refugees and people seeking asylum. While it is encouraging to see the Victorian government's commitment of over \$3.4 million in the 2025–26 state budget to support asylum seekers and newly arrived refugees, it would be great to understand if this is funding for frontline community organisations who are embedded in the communities they serve and who fill critical gaps that larger service providers may not reach. Many of these community organisations operate with volunteer staff, with minimal resources and are forced to rely on short-term competitive grants just to stay afloat.

In the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne small initiatives supporting refugees have faced significant funding challenges. While many organisations receive support through programs like the settlement engagement and transition support program, also known as SETS, some small initiatives struggle to secure sustainable funding. Investing in these grassroots organisations is essential for building a more inclusive and effective refugee support network and closing service gaps. Minister, will you commit to publishing a list of these community-led organisations in the 2024–25 budget as well as the 2025–26 budget?

Warrnambool tech school

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:08): (1721) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education Ben Carroll, and I would like to have an update on the Warrnambool tech school. The Allan Labor government is continuing to invest in tech schools across our state, with a

new tech school in Warrnambool being funded in the 2025–26 Victorian budget as part of an overall budget package worth \$9.16 million. I look forward to the minister's update.

Sentinel events

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:08): (1722) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. I have raised on a number of occasions over the last few years the issue around sentinel events. The government released their report on the eve of the long weekend – it was very inconsistent with last year's release. It is still very behind and has no consistency to form the reports. Nevertheless what is very concerning is the number of sentinel events that are arising.

Members might recall that I raised in this place in February of this year a number of reported sentinel events at Latrobe Regional Health, where there have been nine events in five years, and some of those have included children. Sentinel events involving children have been an issue for a number of years, and there have been some very, very sad cases, especially through the COVID years when there were a lot of issues that were impacting on the health system and some of the issues that arose from that, including the unfortunate and untimely death of children, and they have been reported.

Following that increase due to the deterioration in children in 2021–22 the government announced the Safer Care for Kids project in 2023, promising to implement three recommendations to address this concerning increase. It included a family escalation system for families to raise concerns about children when their conditions deteriorate; a virtual paediatric emergency consultation system; and it mandated the Victorian children's tool for observation and response, or ViCTOR. It appears that the latest update on the department's website in relation to the Safer Care for Kids project was a post on 20 August 2024 reporting that the project has progressed to phase 3, which involves piloting and testing. Now, the reason I am raising this is this has been ongoing for a number of years. The Safer Care Victoria website states that it will be at least another 12 months until this is up and running, and that is three years since the government first announced that the program was to be undertaken. The AMA has raised concerns about the lack of consistent oversight and reporting within Victoria's health system by writing to the Minister for Health in November 2024 and Safer Care in December 2024, and I have raised that issue in this place before and argued that point. Dr Jill Tomlinson, the AMA's Victorian branch president at the time, said in March this year that the response to date did not indicate to her that they would act any time soon on calls for change. So the action I seek is for the minister to explain the delay in implementing these important measures to improve outcomes for the care of children in our health system, and particularly around that rollout of the phase 3 pilot of Safer Care for Kids.

Kangaroo control

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:11): (1723) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is the urgent release of the kangaroo harvesting program report for quarter 1 of 2025. The first quarter of the year ended in March, yet we are now in mid-June, and the public is still left without any information regarding the killing of our iconic kangaroos. There is no information available on how many kangaroos have been killed, how many government-issued tags have been used, where these killings have occurred or how any compliance has been monitored. This delay is unacceptable, especially given the Allan Labor government's announcement last Friday that they will make it even easier to kill kangaroos in drought conditions, offering rebates to do so. This decision is abhorrent, especially when we know there is a push from farming and industry groups for even higher kill quotas in 2025. This decision has been made without the public release of the quarter 1 data, data that would show whether harvest zones are being pushed beyond their limits, if quotas are already being met or if they are being exceeded. It is downright irresponsible for our Premier to offer rebates to encourage the slaughter of kangaroos without even the most basic transparency being provided to the community. This reckless disregard for the devastating impact on our iconic kangaroo populations fuels the largest land-based wildlife massacre on the planet,

and yet it persists in near-total secrecy, shielded from proper public scrutiny under the veil of darkness at night.

The department claims the report is finalised and will be released soon. But soon has come and it has gone. We are now halfway through the year, and its absence is impossible to ignore. Tens of thousands of native kangaroos are killed through this program every single year in our state. These reports are not a courtesy. They are a minimum standard of transparency for a system that is already widely criticised both here and across the globe. Minister, I ask that the quarter 1 report be released without further delay. The public has a right to know what is happening to our kangaroos, especially given decisions about their welfare are being made without this critical information being available.

Boat ramps

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (18:14): (1724) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and the action that I seek is for the minister to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is improving water access for Victorians by upgrading boat ramps. The state government is supporting anglers to get out on the water and start fishing by upgrading boat ramps right around the state. Whether it is ongoing major upgrades at Schnapper Point in Mornington and Port Welshpool or the upgraded and opened boat ramp at Cape Conran, Victoria is the best state for recreational fishing, and I look forward to the minister's update.

Fire services

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:14): (1725) The action I seek is from Minister Ward in the other place. Now, Minister Ward unfortunately has a track record when it comes to her new portfolio. We all know in this place that she is wholly incompetent; that is not news to anyone. In fact she was so incompetent at the estimates process she was unable to tell every Victorian where any one of the number of new vehicles or appliances – or as the previous minister called them ‘the big red trucks’ – might go. The existing minister cannot tell a single Victorian where any of the new appliances – but we will call them the big red trucks for the sake of the minister's ease of understanding – will go. Well, there is something we can tell the minister tonight, and that is in a ballot of the firies in this state and their support staff, and it is an important ballot of that critical first responders workforce, no less than 2631 – that is, thousands of firies across this state – have all said in one solitary loud voice that they have no confidence whatsoever in the top brass of Fire Rescue Victoria. As I stand here in 2025, the firefighters of this state – the men and women who we rely upon increasingly not only to put out fires, to keep themselves safe, to keep our property safe but in addition to that to be the very people who in 60 per cent of occasions will be the first responders on site, whether you are suffering from a cardiac arrest or you are the victim in a car accident and for no fault of your own you found yourself in that situation – these critical workers, have spoken with one voice and said they have no confidence whatsoever in the leadership of Fire Rescue Victoria. It is a historic vote. What it tells us, very sadly, is they have absolutely lost confidence, and they will very quickly lose confidence in this minister too and the Premier and the government if this shambles of an operation continues.

We know that firefighters are already having to use equipment that is outdated. We know that up to three-quarters of the fleet is outdated and is unreliable. We know that Ambulance Victoria back in July 2024 had a similar vote, and since then there has been a complete clean-out of that shambles of an organisation – another emergency service that absolutely suffered under the administration of this government. We know about Victoria Police in February of 2025, this year – again, a shambles of an operation. Minister, I hate to say this in front of you, but it is a shambles. To this day Victoria does not even have a police commissioner in tenure, in situ. We actually do not have a police commissioner. It is an embarrassment to say. You had to go through all these hurdles to get this overseas police commissioner, who still has not taken his seat. It a further embarrassment. What I can tell you is this: the firefighters of this state deserve to be listened to, and they have said in one loud voice, ‘Get rid of the top brass.’ Start again in the interests of every firefighter and every Victorian.

Metro Tunnel

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (18:17): (1726) My adjournment matter is for the minister for transport, and the action that I seek is an update from the minister on how the Metro Tunnel is going to change transport for the people of Southern Metro. When the Metro Tunnel opens later this year it is going to be a transformative project that will change the way Melburnians move about Melbourne on public transport, and particularly for those in the Southern Metropolitan Region. It is a groundbreaking project for Melbourne. For people in Southern Metro, we are going to see the Frankston line services returning to the city loop. We are going to see the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines going through the Metro Tunnel. For the passengers on the Sandringham line the budget announced that alongside the introduction of the Metro Tunnel there are going to be more trains running intra-peak. This is a landmark infrastructure project that is going to benefit Melburnians right across the network but particularly in southern metropolitan Melbourne, and I am absolutely excited for it to open later this year.

Roadside vegetation

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:19): (1727) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently review and update the tree cut height limit on major Victorian roads. My constituent Matt reached out recently with concerns over the safety of the current cut height limits on highways such as the Murray Valley Highway in Northern Victoria Region. Matt runs a transport company doing oversize loads. For the last 10 to 15 years he has had numerous issues avoiding overgrown, overhanging trees on the main roads he must use to transport loads. Matt has had numerous conversations with VicRoads and Regional Roads Victoria regarding the cut height limits. The cut height limit currently stands at 5 metres and recut at 4.5 metres. Transport height limits have been adjusted at least once every decade for the past 40 years, yet in that time the cut height limits have not been adjusted to coincide with these changes. This has caused numerous incidents of damage to trucks and cargo. In most cases transport companies are left to foot the bill for the damage to trucks and cargo. In one horrific case witnessed by Matt a sheep raised its head as the stock crate went under a low-hanging branch, causing the animal to be pulled out of the crate, landing on the road. Stock crates are allowed to travel at a height of 4.7 metres, which is above the current re-cut height for trees along the roads. This poses a danger not only to the trucks and stock but also to other motorists on the road, with the very real possibility of branches coming down onto following vehicles and causing a hazard on our roads. The action I seek is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to urgently review and update the tree cut-height limit on major Victorian roads.

Hobsons Bay City Council

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:20): (1728) Another month, another monitor. Rather than working cooperatively with councils the Allan Labor government, in true socialist fashion, has forced yet another state-controlled babysitter on Hobsons Bay City Council. My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Local Government, and the action I seek is that the minister meet with the mayor and councillors to explain how this intervention is remotely justifiable.

Minister, I will always call a spade a spade, so here are some facts. In October last year Hobsons Bay held local government elections, and the ratepayers elected councillors, not monitors. Then in January, after councillors became aware of concerns about workplace safety and the former CEO's fulfilment of his duties, they swiftly suspended him pending further investigation. Soon after, the former CEO resigned. Shamefully, the Local Government Inspectorate failed to inform Hobsons Bay that their previous CEO was under investigation for his involvement in the Rex Theatre scandal at Hepburn Shire Council. They then failed to provide a public report despite repeated calls from across the sector for them to do so.

Minister, why didn't the Local Government Inspectorate publish this report? Were they muzzled by your government? The government made amendments to the Local Government Act 2020 to enable

the Local Government Inspectorate reports to be tabled in this Parliament, so there is no legislative reason to withhold it. Rather than appointing a monitor, this government must come clean as to why this report was never released. Ratepayers deserve to know that their money was not wasted on lining other people's pockets. And let us not forget, government-appointed monitors cost ratepayers money, not government – money that would be better spent no doubt on numerous other important local services. Local ratepayers deserve transparency and democracy, not more secrecy and state interference.

Returned and Services League of Australia

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:23): (1729) My adjournment is for the Minister for Veterans in the other place, Minister Suleyman. My constituency of Southern Metro is home to several veterans who regularly access their necessary services through institutions like the local RSLs. In many respects RSLs remain the cornerstone of the local community, where people of all ages can converge, acting as a de facto community centre for the local area. RSLs play an important role in preserving the history, memory and legacy of those who have served in this country in past wars, including veterans who served in the First World War.

RSL Victoria plays an important role in supporting retired service men and women in adjusting to life back home. This includes the very important fields of both their physical and their mental health, but it also includes advocacy and assistance in other areas of civilian life. They work with education providers and employment programs to help veterans make what is often a difficult transition, and importantly, RSL sub-branches provide retired service men and women with a place of community and social connection, something which we all know is very important.

RSLs have a long history in Victoria, and many sub-branches have long and extensive histories of their own. Take Hawthorn RSL, for example, which was founded in 1917, over 100 years ago, as the Hawthorn returned soldiers social club. And it was 100 years ago this year, in 1925, that funding was approved to build the cenotaph at St James Park in Hawthorn. This was then completed in 1929 and still stands today.

Across Australia there are tens of thousands of men and women who currently serve in the ADF who will need these great institutions of Australian community to be there as they retire and re-enter civilian life, which is why it is important that our RSLs stay in place, serving the community for years, decades and even centuries to come. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me and my office with information about how the 2025–26 Victorian budget is supporting veterans. How is the budget delivering for RSLs in my community of Southern Metro?

Bowel cancer

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:25): (1730) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for her to ensure the government better educates young people on the risks and symptoms of bowel cancer and incorporates frequent testing into medical care for those reaching adulthood. Bowel cancer is rising at an alarming rate amongst young people. It is the most deadly cancer for Australians aged 25 to 44. What is heartbreaking is that 99 per cent of cases would be treatable if caught early. Currently medical guidelines suggest testing every two years, starting at age 45 and continuing to age 74. But the risk of being diagnosed with bowel cancer before the age of 40 has more than doubled since the year 2000.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

This was the case for one of my constituents and a person loved by many: her name was Kasey. Kasey passed away in March of this year after a short but fierce fight with stage 4 bowel cancer. Kasey was only 29 years old. Those who knew her say she was a kind and joyful person, the kind of person who found a way to make everyone laugh, even at her funeral, the kind of person who would send a message checking in on how you were doing, even when she was undergoing chemotherapy. Before

her diagnosis, she was planning her wedding and had just booked tickets for an overseas trip with her friends. A life tragically cut short, the loss of Kasey is being felt deeply by those who loved her, and this is the reality of so many.

We know that increased awareness and education and more frequent testing could make a difference. Cancer is devastating, and we must do everything we can to catch it as early as possible. We need greater education on symptoms, particularly targeted towards young people who may be unaware that they are at risk. But symptoms may not appear until much later or may be written off as being from other medical conditions. A lingering assumption that bowel cancer only affects the elderly can have devastating consequences. That is why we also need to introduce testing for bowel cancer upon reaching and throughout adulthood, because if it is caught early, 99 per cent of cases are treatable. To anyone receiving this message, visit Bowel Cancer Australia's website, get tested, look out for symptoms, and if something does not feel or look right, do not ignore it.

Foster carers

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:27): (1731) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children. I rise again to raise the urgent need for greater support for Victoria's foster carers, particularly those in regional communities. Across the state, the foster care system is under growing pressure. In Victoria over 550 foster carers left the system in 2022–23 and less than 250 commenced. For several years Victoria has had the highest carer attrition rate of any state in Australia. The loss of good carers impacts the quality of care provided to children.

Recent data reveals a sharp rise in the number of children under 12 entering residential care, driven by a high number of foster families exiting the system and a lack of respite care, which leads to carer burnout. This is deeply concerning, not only for carers but for the vulnerable children who miss out on the opportunity to be raised in a supportive family environment. The alternative, residential care, is not only less personal and nurturing but also incredibly expensive, costing the government up to \$600,000 per child. In contrast, one foster care placement level 1 care allowance is between \$11,600 and \$17,000 per year. Despite these figures, Victoria continues to invest poorly in foster care. Of the \$1.67 billion allocated to child protection, only 7.5 per cent supports foster care – the very people providing care in their homes. The care allowance in Victoria has not increased since 2016 and remains the lowest in the country. Carers are expected to cover the growing costs of care out of their own pockets, and many, like Carol, a long-term carer who lives in central Victoria, tell me that they are struggling under the weight of their expenses. Carers are leaving and children are suffering.

The action I seek is for the minister to make changes, including increasing the foster care allowance, introducing a remote allowance for regional carers to address the unique transport and services challenges they face, improving funding for essential services not covered by the carer allowance and encouraging greater inclusion and respect for carers in care planning. Foster carers are doing extraordinary work for our most vulnerable children. It is time they received the recognition, respect and support they deserve.

Upper Beaconsfield Recreation Reserve

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:30): (1732) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, who is here with us today – hello – and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting the Upper Beaconsfield recreation reserve to discuss the Upper Beaconsfield community sport and Scout pavilion project with the community, with members of the committee and with the Shire of Cardinia to hear firsthand about how this project will be benefiting the community. Construction on this project, which has benefited from \$3.5 million in the Growing Suburbs Fund, will be commencing very, very soon. It will replace the existing aged and non-compliant facility, where currently the boys have to go to access their change rooms through the kitchen and the girls have to go around outside to the back, a totally unacceptable situation and one that will be fully rectified with the terrific new buildings. It will also serve the current

users as well as the broader Upper Beaconsfield community to allow for an increase of activities and participation. I very much look forward to the minister's response.

Western Metropolitan Region level crossing removals

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:31): (1733) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding activities with the removal of level crossings in the west, particularly boom gates along the Melton railway line. The action I seek is for the minister to prioritise the removal of the level crossings at Leakes Road, Troups Road North, Paynes Road and Mount Cottrell Road in Rockbank as part of the Melton line level crossing removals. Rockbank is one of the fastest growing suburbs in Melbourne's west, and in two decades it is expected to be home to some 25,000 residents, a 198 per cent increase on the current population data. This means more families, more traffic and more cars on Rockbank's roads. The aforementioned level crossings are currently not scheduled for removal with other crossings along the Melton line. To futureproof the suburb from gridlock and improve safety, the minister should equally prioritise these crossing removals. Given the Allan Labor government has no current plan to remove the level crossings in Rockbank, could the minister please update my constituents and the City of Melton as to when they will be considered for removal?

Boom gates at Leakes Road near Rockbank station are currently down around 28 minutes in the morning peak while trains pass by. These level crossings carry approximately 9000 vehicles each day. In the next six years the number is anticipated to increase to a massive 20,600 per day. Nearby on Paynes Road, boom gate traffic modelling commissioned by the City of Melton showed that this will increase to over 9000 vehicles per day in just five years once the area explodes in population, with future developments coming online. At Mount Cottrell Road, Melton South, boom gates are down for the same time as others, but concerningly there have been two crashes at this site, including one serious collision and one fatal in the years preceding the pandemic. These sites carry about 1500 cars per day, and with the same modelling done by the council, the volume will increase to over 9300 per day by 2031. So could the government please include these four level crossings as part of the future work that they intend to undertake along the Melton line and provide the necessary funding to include them for removal at the earliest possible opportunity?

Northern Victoria Region road safety

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:34): (1734) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to instruct the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) to remove hazardous tree branches on roads in northern Victoria and improve the VicRoads online hazard reporting form to make it suitable for regional roads. Two constituents have recently alerted me to a lack of vegetation management by the Department of Transport and Planning along regional Victorian roads. One constituent contacted me to say that the C338, Bendigo-Tennyson Road, through the Whipstick forest north of Bendigo has dead trees hanging over and collapsing on the road, creating a serious safety hazard. Another constituent got in touch to warn me that along the stretch of the Midland Highway between the C355, the Murchison turnoff and Elmore, there are about a dozen large gum trees with dead branches that overhang the highway. These pose a serious risk as they may break and fall at any moment, especially during high winds, which could have catastrophic consequences if a branch were to hit a car travelling at speed or force a driver to swerve. My constituent tried to report this hazard on the VicRoads website, but the online form requires you to put in a street address and town in order to submit a report. These requirements are simply not appropriate for reporting hazards on long stretches of country road. The minister must improve the VicRoads online hazard reporting form to make it suitable for regional roads and instruct DTP to urgently cut back dead branches that overhang the Midland Highway.

Responses

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:36): This evening we had

17 adjournment matters, 16 of those will be referred to the relevant ministers for response. Thank you to Mr Galea who has asked an action item from me in relation to Development Victoria precincts and the \$3.5 million Growing Suburbs Fund allocation for the Upper Beaconsfield Recreation Reserve. Thank you to Mr Galea for all of his advocacy to make sure that facilities can be delivered for growing parts of the community that make sure that amenity is provided, that we address and reduce areas of disadvantage and lack of opportunity, particularly for women and girls, in getting involved and engaged in their communities. I would be absolutely delighted to join you, Mr Galea, in a visit to see this really, really impressive work and the outcomes that can be delivered.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:37): I am just seeking to follow up some outstanding adjournment matters for either answering or explanation from the ministers. That is number 1633 for the Minister for Corrections, number 1465 for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and numbers 1622 and 1581 for the Premier.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:37): Thank you, Ms Copsey, for that. Apologies for any confusion on the adjournment earlier. I would be very pleased to follow those items up and to get you responses.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:38 pm.