



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 17 June 2025

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew ¹	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaele	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira ²	Western Metropolitan	Lib	Ratnam, Samantha ⁵	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem ⁶	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina ³	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David ⁴	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard ⁷	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 March 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;
LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;
Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Tuesday 17 June 2025

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

Announcements

Photography in chamber

The PRESIDENT (12:04): We will have a photographer taking action shots. Just to let members know, if you do see a photographer, do not be alarmed. We are expecting some action so they can take some shots.

Condolences

Hon Charles Race Thorson Mathews

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death, on 5 May 2025, of the Honourable Charles Race Thorson Mathews and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Oakleigh from 1979 to 1992 and as Minister for the Arts and Minister for Police and Emergency Services from 1982 to 1987 and Minister for Community Services from 1987 to 1988.

It is an honour on behalf of the government to lead off the motion. We will hear from a few others in the chamber, particularly those that knew Dr Mathews personally. We acknowledge Race Mathews as a tireless advocate for fairness, democracy and the public good through his service over many years in all three levels of government.

Dr Mathews began his career as a teacher and speech therapist working in schools across Gippsland and Melbourne, but his public journey began in earnest when he joined the Australian Labor Party in the late 1950s. From those days through to his final years he was driven by a singular belief in the power of government to change lives and a determination to ensure it did. He rose to prominence as principal private secretary to Gough Whitlam, where he helped shape transformative policy on education and health, including in the foundations of what would become Medicare. In that role and in every role that followed he was a builder of policy, of institutions, of ideas.

Elected to the federal Parliament as the member for Casey in 1972, Dr Mathews brought the same intellect and compassion to the national office. Later, as the state member for Oakleigh from 1979 to 1992, he left an unforgettable mark on Victoria through his ministerial work in the Cain government. As Minister for Police and Emergency Services Dr Mathews introduced major gun law reforms, modernised Victoria Police and led the overhaul of the state's emergency response systems in the wake of the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires.

As Minister for the Arts he championed cultural participation, oversaw the opening of the Arts Centre in Southbank and helped establish signature events such as the Melbourne International Arts Festival and the Melbourne Writers Festival. He led reforms to child protection and the deinstitutionalisation of care for people with intellectual disabilities as the Minister for Community Services.

Dr Mathews's intellectual contributions were matched by his work to further the Labor cause. As leader of the Australian Fabian Society for decades, he mentored generations of Labor thinkers and helped chart the policy directions of the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating governments. He campaigned for internal Labor reform, democratic accountability and a more engaged civic life.

Beyond politics Dr Mathews had a rich personal life and was a friend and mentor to many in this Parliament and beyond. Race Mathews was many things – a politician, academic, reformer, author – but above all he was a servant of the public. His life's work was animated by a belief that our shared

future is something we must all help shape. Victoria is a fairer, more thoughtful and more compassionate place because of the contribution of Race Mathews. On behalf of the government, I extend my deepest condolences to his wife Iola and children and extended family.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:08): I am pleased to associate the Liberals and Nationals with this condolence motion for Race Mathews. He was a very significant figure in postwar politics in Victoria in particular and Australia more generally.

I did know Race Mathews quite well. I grew up in Croydon, and I actually remember the 1972 and 1975 elections well enough to remember that he had been elected as our local member in that area. It was not something I was delighted with even in those days. But having said that, I also had quite a bit to do with him in the 1980s, when he was active as the member for Oakleigh in a number of campaigns within the Labor Party around WorkCover and other matters, and I had a good deal to do with him on those issues. I would meet him in his Oakleigh electorate office and provide him with significant research, which he would use to significant effect.

In particular, I want to associate our side of politics with our respect for him and his wife and family and note that he did make a significant contribution. We did not always agree with his views, but that is a different matter. I wish his family and others well.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): Dr Race Mathews showed us just what we can accomplish when we aspire. He was an idealist and a visionary, and Race dedicated his life to proving that, yes, it can be done. I think we can say without a shadow of a doubt that Victoria and Australia are a better state and nation because of the extraordinary life of Race Mathews, and it is safe to say also that Labor is a better party of politics and ideas as well. As the Leader of the Government said, Race served as Gough Whitlam's principal private secretary in opposition, doing the hard yards on policy and, among other things, developing the case for and design of what has become Medicare. Quality healthcare provision for Australians became a fundamental right, not a privilege for those who could afford it – an idea that impacts on our society and on our politics to this day. He was an early champion of state aid to the poor and non-government schools and championed education during his time in the federal Parliament.

As Minister for the Arts in the state Parliament, Race, among other things, established what was known as the Spoleto festival, which was twinned with an arts festival in Spoleto, Italy, drawing on the richness of Melbourne's multicultural heart to set the arts community of our city and our state on an open and engaging trajectory. Spoleto grew into the Melbourne International Arts Festival and has Rising as its successor and a legacy of art for the people.

Race was indefatigable in his pursuit of equality for all, and it was a pursuit that took him from those humble beginnings as a schoolteacher through policy roles with Whitlam, as an MP at both a state and a federal level and as an academic – even to Spain, where Race took inspiration from the Mondragon Corporation, which operated as a federation of workers cooperatives. He said on ABC radio in 2017:

All my life I've been on the hunt for good ways of making a better world – making life more rewarding for ordinary people ... [I was delighted to hear in the 1980s that] something extraordinary was going on in an obscure valley in the Basque region of Spain.

He did take inspiration from those ideas. Others have written that Race could recognise and embrace ideas even if they were not his own. Cooperatives and the mutual movement, which he championed, had thought links to distributism – an economic theory asserting that the world's productive assets should be widely owned rather than concentrated – and arose from the teachings of the Catholic social justice movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly under former Pope Leo. In his recently released biography his wife, the biographer Iola Mathews, wrote that at first he was dismissive of the cooperative movement because of these links and Race's own attitudes towards BA Santamaria. As ever, Race was a product of Victorian Labor in the 1950s and 1960s, but he recognised the value of the core ideas of wide ownership of assets and went on to champion them for decades.

Born in Hawthorn in 1935, Race became an active member of the Labor movement from the 1950s, organising from his home in Croydon. He was a champion of the democratisation of our party, of opening it up to new ideas. A supporter of federal intervention in the 1970s, Race recognised that winning meant more for the people Labor sought to serve than the ideological comfort of the solace of opposition, and these efforts have had an important and indelible impact on Labor in Victoria. Federal intervention in the Victorian ALP in the 1970s arguably was the foundation for the success of modern Labor in Victoria, from Cain to Bracks and beyond. I hope we as a party keep remembering these lessons even if we can be hopeful that others do not.

He unsuccessfully contested the state seat of Box Hill in 1964 before being elected as the federal Labor member for Casey from 1972 to 1975 and then the state member for Oakleigh from 1979 to 1992. He was a minister during the Cain government and served in a range of portfolios. After 1992, though, there was no such thing as post-politics for Race. Ceasing to hold office did not deny Race furthering the progressive cause; nothing deterred his desire for our society to be better. As a long-term secretary of the Fabian Society and their pursuit of social justice until 2006 and over many, many years he continued to give generously with his time and his wisdom – a champion for democracy in the Labor Party and always – always – a supporter of the next generation of aspiring thinkers. In recent years his home in South Yarra always proudly displayed the corflute of the local Labor candidate, and I know that many local branch members have valued his engagement with them over many, many years.

On behalf of all Labor Party members in this part of the world, our thoughts are with his wife Iola and their children, who I am sure are very proud of his life's work. We should all aspire to the ambition that Race strived for and to look for what we can achieve. To anyone in this place or elsewhere who wants to leave the world in a better place than how they found it, Race taught us how to be ambitious and that with belief and perseverance you can achieve great things. Vale.

The PRESIDENT: I ask members to signify their assent to the motion by rising in their places for 1 minute.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

The PRESIDENT: Proceedings will now be suspended as a further mark of respect. The chair will be resumed in 1 hour.

Sitting suspended 12:17 pm until 1:22 pm.

Bills

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Bill 2024

Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2024

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (13:22): I have a message from the Lieutenant-Governor, dated 3 June:

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

17/2025 Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025

18/2025 Gambling Legislation Amendment (Pre-commitment and Carded Play) Act 2025

19/2025 Retirement Villages Amendment Act 2025

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:23): (941) My question is directed to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to reports of the manipulation of ambulance transfer data at the Northern Hospital. The ambulance output measure ‘Proportion of ambulance patient transfers within 40 minutes’ in the 2024–25 budget has an expected outcome of just 65.5 per cent, which is far lower than the 90 per cent target. Treasurer, can you assure the house that the integrity of these figures upon which the budget measure depends is beyond reproach, or have these budget figures been cooked?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:23): I thank Ms Crozier for her question, but it is unfortunately just another example of a portfolio issue that is being shoehorned into the Treasury portfolio because it is connected to money. In relation to the matter that Ms Crozier is referring to, the department is commissioning an external audit of that data is my understanding. In relation to the integrity of the figures in the budget and any of the outputs et cetera, I do hold them in the highest regard in relation to their accuracy et cetera, and we are the only state in the country that has them independently verified by the Auditor-General.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:25): Just for the Treasurer to note, this is in your own budget papers – ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 66. It is clearly there. It is spelt out. It is very clear. You were responsible for it. What steps has the Treasurer taken to ensure the integrity of these budget measures, and will Treasury independently investigate these dodgy measures in your budget paper?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:25): It is my expectation that health services report data accurately and uphold their own –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is my expectation that they should. In relation to the matters that the member has put to me, I would refer her to the health minister.

ADHD services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:26): (942) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. The New South Wales government recently introduced reforms to enable general practitioners with appropriate training to diagnose and initiate treatment for ADHD. GPs and people living with ADHD across Victoria are now calling for your government to follow suit. Currently it is almost a universal experience for people living with ADHD that they struggle to access diagnosis and treatment, with their journey to a fuller understanding of their neurodivergence marked by a lack of access to services, prohibitive costs, frustration and despair. Minister, will you work with the Minister for Health to see reforms akin to those in New South Wales enacted in Victoria?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:26): I thank Dr Mansfield for her question. It is an important issue. I know a lot of families in Victoria and right around the country face real challenges when they are trying to access specialist care for members of their family who may need diagnosis around ADHD, whether that is children or whether that is adults later in life. I absolutely can confirm that I will be working closely with the Minister for Health on this matter, and indeed I will be working with state, territory and federal counterparts as well. This was a matter that was discussed at last week’s health ministers meeting; there was a joint session in that meeting with mental health ministers as well. We have certainly agreed that we will do some more work on making sure that we can consult with the sector around what ways we can improve access to prescribing but also ways that we can improve access to diagnosis, which is obviously the key when you want to begin a treatment plan and care for

individuals that are diagnosed with ADHD. There is a real commitment to seeing whether we can standardise the approach across the country so it is not piecemeal in each state and territory. I would be happy to keep you up to date on that work.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:28): I am really heartened to hear that response and look forward to seeing progress in this space. As you would be aware, currently public outpatient psychiatric care for ADHD is very limited in Victoria. Public diagnostic services, as far as I am aware, are non-existent in Victoria for adults over 25. As outlined in the Grattan Institute's report this week on access to specialist care, private psychiatric care is the most expensive, and I am aware of ADHD assessments costing up to \$2000. Minister, what are you going to do to improve public psychiatric outpatient care for people living with ADHD?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:29): I would agree with you. Access to private psychiatrists is a matter for the Commonwealth, but we do work closely across the country on making sure that we are complementing each other's efforts when it comes to attraction and retention of these key areas of the mental health workforce. In relation to publicly funded programs, we have had some good increases in the number of psychiatry registrars in Victoria, with more than 90 that have been delivered since 2023. In the 2025–26 budget we included \$6.9 million to continue a highly successful program, which is the junior medical officers program, so that there is a rotation through the mental health disciplines. That has certainly had the effect of increasing the number of junior doctors pursuing psychiatry as a specialty. We will keep working on these sorts of programs that are all about attracting these professionals into the public system – but more than that, they are about ultimately providing more access to specialist care for Victorians.

Ministers statements: pill testing

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:30): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's pill-testing trial. Yesterday I was very proud to announce that Victoria's first fixed site for pill testing will be located at 95 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. The service is close to one of Melbourne's most popular nightlife hubs as well as public transport, health care and social services, and it will offer access to the same life-saving advice and testing services that we have been delivering during the summer festival season.

I want to be clear: pill testing is not about condoning drug use and it is not about telling people that drugs are safe. It is about providing Victorians with the information they are asking for to help them make more informed, possibly life-saving decisions. In an increasingly volatile and unpredictable drug market, this has never been more important. Victorians who use the service will be provided with information on the contents of their drugs. But the service is much more than a technical result; it is also providing critical harm reduction information to reduce risk.

We saw in part of the summer festival season that for 65 per cent of service users it was the first time they had ever had a conversation with a health professional about their drug use, and more than 30 per cent said they would take a smaller amount as a result of those conversations. Two statewide drug alerts were also issued to the public following the detection of highly potent and unexpected substances with unpredictable effects, and this shows the service is working as designed to reduce harm, raise awareness and ultimately save lives. No drug is ever truly safe, but Victorians deserve to have all the information possible to help them make better, safer and more informed decisions – and that is what we will be providing in Fitzroy.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next question can I acknowledge former member for Pascoe Vale Christine Campbell in the gallery.

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:32): (943) My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to budget paper 2 and the sensitivity analysis at page 83 and beyond and other points surrounding the economic context. Did the government examine or model the risk of higher energy costs or the risk of supply interruptions of gas and electricity on its presumptions for Victorian economic growth? If so, what were the conclusions, and if not, why not?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:33): Thank you, Mr Davis, for your question. In relation to the sensitivity modelling, there are a number of factors that go into that. The granular detail that Mr Davis is referring to I do not have at hand. It was a topic of conversation at PAEC in relation to some of the matters that are factored in, such as interest rate rises et cetera. I would be happy to provide more information for Mr Davis on the broader things that go into the sensitivity modelling. I think that would be more useful than answering the question as you have posed it. Sorry to rephrase your question, but if you want more advice on what goes into the sensitivity modelling, I am more than happy to provide that. But the way, again, the question is framed, it is trying to put a portfolio issue in the remit of the Treasurer's core responsibilities. I am always happy to be helpful, but I think the more appropriate answer from the Treasurer in relation to the question about the sensitivities of the modelling – I am happy to provide more information to Mr Davis on that.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:34): I thank the Treasurer for providing that information, specifically about the risks of supply interruptions of gas or electricity. To assist the Treasurer, budget paper 2 does discuss a decline in inflation over the past year and claims this was:

... primarily due to significant drops in automotive fuel and electricity prices, the latter reflecting the impact of temporary government ... rebates.

So in one sense I am partially answering the question. Will a surge in gas or electricity prices weaken the government's inflation projections or will the massive surges in price and the risk of supply interruption seen in the last week have no effect on inflation and the budget's underpinnings?

The PRESIDENT: There were a couple of questions there and they were both hypothetical. I am going to let the Treasurer answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (13:35): There were a range of hypothetical situations that Mr Davis was trying to put into a question framed up for the Treasurer. I believe that my answer to his substantive question would satisfy in response to his supplementary.

Assisted reproductive treatment services

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:36): (944) My question is for the Minister for Health in the other place. Only a few weeks ago we heard the shocking story of a Queensland patient who gave birth to a stranger's child as a result of an incorrect embryo transfer, and now Monash IVF have admitted another error: a Victorian patient's own embryo was transferred instead of their partner's. The Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand have been calling for a national reform approach to ensure uniform regulation of fertility care, including IVF. While I commend the minister for leading calls for the immediate implementation of a regulator, I understand that a national meeting of health ministers failed to reach a consensus on this proposal. So my question is: what else is the minister doing to push for the uniform regulation of IVF to be on the national agenda?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:36): I would be very happy to refer that question to the Minister for Health for a written response in accordance with the standing orders.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:37): I thank the minister for referring my question on. By way of supplementary, I understand that the Victorian health regulator is currently

investigating the incident in Victoria. Can the minister advise when this investigation will be completed and whether its findings will be publicly available?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (13:37): Thanks, Ms Payne. I will pass that supplementary on, and I am sure you will get a written response very soon.

Ministers statements: Beechworth Correctional Centre

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (13:37): It is my pleasure to rise today to acknowledge the 20th anniversary of the Beechworth Correctional Centre and the enormous contribution this facility has made to the local community over this time. All staff, past and present, deserve our congratulations for their hard work and dedication to making Beechworth prison the excellent institution that it is.

As a minimum-security facility, Beechworth and Corrections Victoria work closely with the local community to help people in custody prepare for a successful reintegration. The prison industries at Beechworth offer an array of skills development that make it easier for prisoners to get a job following their release. This includes in areas like agriculture, construction, cookery and warehousing. Beechworth prison continues to contribute back into the community in many ways. The Wodonga Dog Rescue program sees prisoners preparing dogs for adoption, with over 120 dogs already rehomed. The Ruffy swag program is delivered in partnership with Carevan, and prisoners make swags for those sleeping rough. An impressive 123 swags, on the latest information I have, have been delivered since 2023. And it would be remiss of me to not mention the wildlife rehabilitation program that has seen 73 orphaned wombats prepared for their reintegration back into the wild.

I was pleased to visit Beechworth last week to be part of the 20th anniversary celebrations. I joined over a hundred family members, friends and community partners to acknowledge the long service that many staff members have provided to Victoria's corrections system. I had the honour of presenting awards to many staff, including the 35 years of service award to Mr Craig Gibbs. What a remarkable contribution to the Victorian community, Craig.

To all the staff and community partners who have made a contribution to the Beechworth prison over the last 20 years, I wish to say thank you and put on the official record the thanks of our government. Here is to a continued bright future for the Corrections Victoria facility and the important roles it plays in the community and keeping us all safe.

Suburban Rail Loop

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:39): (945) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Minister, the property industry says it is not financially viable to build new apartments in your SRL precincts because the funding model discourages property development. Max Shifman of Intrapac Property says the industry would not be able to deliver the number of homes promised by the government. Victoria's Housing Industry Association executive director Keith Ryan said the value of living in an SRL precinct may not be sufficient to justify the additional costs and that consumers and the industry would elect to build elsewhere. Minister, if those in the industry are saying they will not invest in your SRL East precincts, how on earth can you meet your 70,000 homes target?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (13:40): What a treat it is, Mr Mulholland, to get a question from you on the Suburban Rail Loop, particularly when you work the points of view of a couple of people from industry into your contribution. I have had the benefit of discussions and engagement with the HIA and the property council, and that is part of ongoing work that this government continues to do. What I would say to the points that you have raised in the first instance to Mr Shifman – you do not need to hire a private investigator to understand that the Suburban

Rail Loop is necessary as a nation-building project, that it is necessary to address the chronic shortage of housing, that it is necessary to develop precincts that do not require people to go into the centre of Australia's largest city and that it is necessary and appropriate that in the course of developing that business case and the investment case that builds upon *Plan Melbourne*, the very issue that was identified from the outset by the former leader of the coalition –

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Harriet SHING: I will take you up on that interjection there, Mr Mulholland. I did think it was Matthew Guy's idea, but then I went back and I had a look, and all Matthew Guy ever did was to describe the problem. All he ever did and all you have ever done is describe the problem. And what you have failed to do –

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: And there we go.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, I would just ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question rather than debating and reflecting on the opposition.

The PRESIDENT: I will rule on the point of order. Interjections are unruly, and the minister should try not to respond.

Harriet SHING: I will try to ignore the commentary from those opposite, particularly as it has failed to yield any solutions to the challenges of growth, affordability and availability of housing.

When we talk about value capture and when we talk about the work that we are doing in partnership with industry, it is important to note that the model that is set out in the business and investment case yielding a return on the business case ratio of 1.1 to 1.7 is about making sure that we have an allocation-of-funding commitment from a range of different sources. This is not new. The Sydney Harbour Bridge was developed using value capture amongst other parts of the state. There is the city loop. You can go to Paris, go to London, go to Sydney. The work on the Metro in Sydney was developed in part using value capture. When we talk about these models it is easy to understand the fact that you do not actually buy into this because you never delivered a major project while you were in government. That is why it is left to us to make sure we are partnering with industry and to make it clear that value capture measures will be targeted at commercial property developers, who will receive windfall financial gains from the project. The measures will not be targeted at current home owners or residents. This is not something unique to the Suburban Rail Loop. You would be well advised to tell stakeholders that that is in fact something that continues to apply across the board.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:43): Minister, I am glad you mentioned the modelling in the business and investment case, given your 2021 business and investment case and the modelling behind it says that the SRL lease will only lead to an extra 25,000 dwellings, not 70,000. Does this mean the business and investment case is out of date? If so, will the government be releasing updated modelling?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (13:44): Thank you, Mr Mulholland. Again, the business and investment case does set the framework for delivery of Australia's largest housing project, the largest infrastructure project that we have and a project that will ensure that in the delivery of orbital rail we are in a position to address some of the challenges of congestion and of growth that we know that other major cities around the world have already done and done so with significant success. Now, what we have done in the modelling that we have delivered is also built upon precincts, Mr Mulholland. It is unfortunate that you had not actually addressed that to me in my capacity as minister for precincts or indeed as housing or as building. This is a combined effort. When the portfolios were allocated at the end of last year it was with –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, the minister has not gone near the question of why the business case says 25,000 homes – the government is now saying 70,000 – and if the business case is out of date. Which one is right?

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was relevant to the question. As she was saying, the modelling was added upon from precincts, so I think she was very relevant.

Harriet SHING: Mr Mulholland, you may not want to know about precincts, but we are certainly delivering the work to facilitate them. So that 70,000 homes represents the net growth of households to 2056 within the declared planning areas, and that includes precincts around SRL East stations within a 1600-metre radius of those stations.

Firewood collection

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (13:46): (946) My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Environment. With winter firmly upon us and a rise predicted in already high energy prices, it is a good time to revisit the puzzling restrictions on the collection of firewood on public land. Not everyone can keep up with the ever-increasing cost of living, particularly those on fixed incomes and in rural areas. Add to that those off the grid because of cost or by choice and you have a real need for a source of heating, and that is firewood. The current restrictions are causing a supply shortage, which leads to increased costs – it is basic economics – costs that few can readily absorb. My question is: will the minister, as a matter of urgency, investigate the lengthening of the so-called season and the areas available for collection of firewood so that those who need the wood for heating can collect enough to see them through one of the colder winters in years?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (13:46): I thank the member for the question. The question will be referred to the Minister for Environment, and he will respond to your question as per the standing orders.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (13:47): I thank the minister for passing it on. Those that do collect their own firewood often cannot afford their own four-wheel drive and trailer, meaning they can only go a short way into a state forest to do their collection. Will the minister commit to ensuring access roads to those specified collection areas are properly maintained so that a standard two-wheel drive vehicle can access them?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (13:47): I thank the member for his supplementary, and it will be referred to the Minister for Environment.

Ministers statements: early childhood education and care

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:47): I rise to update the house on how the Allan government is giving Victorian children the best start in life through our Building Blocks program. When it comes to children's services, we know that we cannot operate in silos; we need a holistic approach to their delivery. Building Blocks partnerships with councils are helping to make that possible. Just yesterday I visited Jamieson Way Community Centre kindergarten with the member for Point Cook in the other place. This fabulous kinder received \$2.75 million towards an expansion as part of the Building Blocks partnership with Wyndham City Council. The upgrades include a third kinder room, a larger outdoor play space and maternal and child health spaces. We had a tour of the kinder, and we met with the amazing maternal and child health nurses, who spoke to us about how the new integrated centre is already helping children and families in the Point Cook community.

Building Blocks partnerships are critical in the delivery of coordinated and, where possible, co-located services. To date, we have 18 partnerships that are helping build and upgrade 109 kinders right across Victoria. But we know there is more to do, and that is why the Building Blocks program is so important, because every child deserves to access a good and equitable education no matter their background or abilities, and the Building Blocks inclusion stream means that all Victorian kinder kids

can learn and play in a modern and inclusive environment. Last week I joined the member for Ashwood in the other place on a visit to Benwerrin kinder to celebrate the kinder's successful inclusion grant. This delightful community-run kinder has received almost \$200,000 to upgrade its outdoor play areas and establish a sensory garden, making it a safer and more inclusive space for children of all abilities. Thank you to the educators Mel and Toni for sharing the plans for the upgrade with us and introducing us to the children who will benefit from this new and more inclusive environment.

Since 2020 the Building Blocks inclusion grants program has made a difference for thousands of children and families, with 204 infrastructure projects funded, including playgrounds, and 1087 equipment projects. While those opposite want to charge Victorian families for children accessing kinder, our government is investing in families. We are delivering the building blocks to give our littlest learners the best start in life and we are funding the projects that will do it.

Housing

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:39): (947) My question is for the minister for housing. Minister, I refer to the meeting minutes of Homes Victoria, which show the board considering plans to lower the unit prices of the government's 44 public housing towers project by cutting corners. Does every proposal for the 44 towers meet the government's guidelines and rules for the size and amenity of that housing?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (13:50): Thank you very much, Mr Welch, for that question. This is a really important area of the growth and the delivery of amenity and of housing across the state. The 44 towers are part of a long-term policy framework and an arc to make sure that we can not only treble the density of housing across those sites but also make sure that we are replacing that ageing stock, which is no longer fit for purpose, that does not comply with current codes, including as they relate to flood, fire, seismic activity and to ventilation, to natural light and to general amenity and right to live in quiet enjoyment.

One of the things that I do want to address just before I go on to the work of what we are delivering across standards and codes is the fact that one of the things that we did have to do when we were elected in 2014 was unravel the abject disgrace that was the environment of permission to build vast volumes of dogboxes, as they were referred to, under the former coalition government. It was something which was not only a disgrace, it approached farce – that people were not in a position to get into a bedroom and not be able to touch the walls when they spread their arms out; that there were homes that had no natural light –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the question as I heard it was very specific about the government's current 44-tower proposal. It was not about the past; it was actually about the government's current proposals and whether they met every requirement.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was being relevant in her backgrounding.

Harriet SHING: It is very defensive when a coalition opposition does not want to talk about the place that brought us here, where dogboxes were de rigueur for the green-light go-aheads for enormous towers.

One of the things that I do also want to make sure that there is no doubt about is we are building homes that comply with the standards and the codes that exist around the delivery of a range of high-quality, safe and livable metrics that make sure that people have places to call home that are modern, that are energy efficient and that are able to be warmed in winter and cooled in summer. It is also about making sure that when we replace these old homes across the towers we do so in a way that is in response to community consultation and engagement, a development that includes a number of different options for bedroom configurations, for size, for the environmental standards and for disability access.

In relation to environmental standards, all of the new Big Housing Build homes that are constructed by Homes Victoria and community housing providers meet a minimum 7-star nationwide house energy rating scheme energy efficiency standard, and people with a – *(Time expired)*

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:53): Thank you, Minister, for your answer. Minister, is it a fact that the government is planning to cut corners and cut costs by building these new buildings at standards lower than your own recommended standards – building, in your own words, dirty, dark dogboxes and forcing public housing tenants to accept that lower standard?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (13:54): Dogboxes, Mr Welch? We got rid of the dogboxes and the standards that you had actually imposed. Just to be really clear, all new homes constructed by Homes Victoria will continue to meet or surpass the National Construction Code and better apartments design standards, including in areas of natural light, ventilation and internal spaces. Homes built by Homes Victoria to date meet these standards, Mr Welch.

Bail laws

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:54): (948) My question today is for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, in 2024 there were 727 people in Victorian prisons that identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Since the Bail Amendment Bill 2025 came into effect, what is the current total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody in Victoria?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (13:55): I thank Ms Copsey for that question and her interest in this matter. In relation to this, obviously sometimes as a minister I do get questions and some are very specific, but I do have this information on hand, Ms Copsey, for that question. I am happy to share that at the moment. As of 6 June, is the information I have, there are 891 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the adult corrections system, so we have seen an increase, I think an increase that is relatively proportionate to the increase we have seen in custody. We do still have the lowest incarceration rate in the nation for people in custody, but we have seen an increase since our tough new bail laws have come into place. We have seen an increase in the remand population in custody. Across the system we were sitting at about 6000; we are sitting at about 6500 across the adult system, of which 14 per cent identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:56): I thank the minister. I am pleased that you are across this topic, but I must say it is disgraceful to be overseeing such an increase in the overincarceration of First Nations people. Minister, do you accept that the Bail Amendment Bill is contributing to the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody in this state and therefore the government is failing its commitments to the Closing the Gap report?

The PRESIDENT: I feel like that is asking an opinion. I will let the minister answer as he sees fit.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (13:56): Thank you, Ms Copsey. As I said in my answer to the substantive, I think it is important to understand that Victoria does have the lowest incarceration rate, but there is clearly an over-representation of Aboriginal people in our criminal justice system throughout the whole system, and obviously, with the corrections system being at the end of the process, there is a gross over-representation. As a government we are committed to Closing the Gap, and we have made significant investments in this space, whether it be health care – and I have talked in this chamber before about Aboriginal health checks – or whether that be in wellbeing officers. But there is still an important role to play.

The supplementary question about the bail laws and their impact is probably best addressed to the Attorney-General. But I think I answered your supplementary in my answer to the substantive. As we are seeing an increase in the broader population of prisons, Aboriginal people are over-represented

throughout the justice system, so we are also seeing an increase in the Aboriginal population in custodial facilities. We have important work to do to make sure that we increase our services proportionally also.

Katherine Copsey: On a point of order, President, in the final seconds of the minister's answer I wonder if you could direct him to be relevant to my question about whether this is consistent with the Closing the Gap report.

The PRESIDENT: I indicated to the minister that I believed the supplementary question was asking of him an opinion. The minister can answer as he sees fit in his role. I believe he has done that. He has got 2 seconds left, but he does not want to take them.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (13:58): While the others block, we are building. I rise to update the house on a significant milestone in delivering more diverse and affordable homes for Victorians right in the heart of one of Melbourne's most vibrant and in-demand suburbs. That is right; I am talking about the Fitzroy Gasworks precinct, with four developers now shortlisted to deliver the final residential section of land. Local: Residential, GFM Group, PDG and Hickory Developments have all been invited to submit proposals under the request-for-proposal stage following the successful completion of the competitive expression-of-interest process.

On this section of land, and despite the opposition of so many people across this Parliament, we will deliver around 350 new homes – on this parcel alone. That is not talk, that is action. The final stage of this precinct is about building on the momentum, adding homes that reflect the diversity, energy and sustainability that define Fitzroy. Design work is progressing on the other parcels of land, with plans expected to be lodged later this year and construction expected to commence following planning approvals next year. Once complete, the gasworks precinct will provide 1200 new homes, including 20 per cent affordable housing, and it will feature the Wurun Senior Campus, the Bundha Sports Centre and a whole range of vibrant public spaces.

Some members want to get in the way of progress and seek to score points rather than deliver new homes. I would ask the Greens over there to pass on to their friend the member for Richmond in the other place that this is about working in partnership with industry and with community housing providers to deliver much-needed housing, including affordable housing. Solving the housing crisis needs government to be actually able to work with industry, and that is what we are doing to get the fastest way home for Victorians across the board. Progress does not happen by chanting slogans and gaslighting constituents with unfounded allegations. It is one thing to say no to affordable housing, no to sustainability, no to progress; it is another thing entirely to recognise that there is more work to be done. We can collaborate to make that happen. Home by home, street by street, community by community, this is what we are building.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (14:00): Minister Tierney will get answers from the Minister for Environment for Mr Bourman in line with the standing orders. I also thank Minister Stitt, who will get answers from the Minister for Health, in line with the standing orders, for Ms Payne.

Constituency questions

Western Victoria Region

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:01): (1625) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. How many homes have been built or are under construction in Western Victoria under the Big Housing Build and other social housing programs? The Allan Labor government is delivering over 16,000 new homes across Victoria through social and affordable

housing programs, and I understand that more than 3400 homes have been commenced in regional Victoria, with over 1900 completed. I look forward to the minister's update.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:01): (1626) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Planning. The minister has admitted that just \$24 million has been allocated across Melbourne's 60 new activity centres, with no new funding beyond 20 June 2026. She also confirmed a \$140 million cut to her department – almost half its budget – meaning councils will be left to manage the fallout of sweeping land use changes alone. In Blackburn in my electorate residents are already voicing concerns about overdevelopment, loss of tree canopy and the impact on neighbourhood character. Now with no state funding and no detailed infrastructure planned, councils like Whitehorse are being asked to do more with less, given the Labor government is pushing for significant population increases in established suburbs without providing the means to support them. My question is: how much more will ratepayers in the City of Whitehorse be forced to pay to fund the government's planning shortfall?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:02): (1627) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Minister, I bring to your attention the dire situation of one of my constituents, a former refugee from Ethiopia. Despite having sought safety on Australian shores, Mr Eliyas and his family are currently without a place to call home. Since their arrival in Australia this family has endured the profound instability of insecure housing, with his sons living in an overcrowded apartment with their elderly grandmother in Flemington, while his wife and daughters reside with a friend in a different property. Despite assessing him as a priority for long-term public housing, Homes Victoria referred this family onto short-term crisis accommodation. Minister, they do deserve a safe, stable environment to heal and integrate, and I ask: when will you provide this desperate family with long-term, stable housing, allowing them to reunite and rebuild their lives with dignity and security?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:03): (1628) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Given the announcement of Victoria's first permanent pill-testing site in Fitzroy, how will this facility benefit residents of the Northern Metropolitan Region? I certainly welcome the announcement of the establishment of the state's first permanent pill-testing site – and that it will be in Fitzroy – which is set to open by August this year. This initiative follows the successful mobile testing trial at five festivals over summer. This mixed site facility will provide free, confidential drug-checking services, enabling early detection of dangerous synthetic drugs. Located near nightlife hubs and public transport, the service is designed to facilitate open, health-focused conversations, helping individuals make informed decisions and reduce harm associated with drug use. This development represents a significant step in Victoria's harm reduction strategy, offering a vital resource for the community to enhance public health and safety.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (14:04): (1629) My question is to the Minister for Creative Industries and is regarding the old Kyneton Primary School site located at Baynton Street in Kyneton. In March 2018 the Victorian government announced a \$12 million commitment to redeveloping the site into a creative community precinct. It was due to be completed 12 months ago, but visiting the site yesterday, I saw it remains fenced off and is inaccessible to the public. I understand that the Macedon Ranges Shire Council has written directly to Creative Victoria seeking a comprehensive update on the status of and future plans for the site. On behalf of local residents, I ask the minister to provide a comprehensive update, including details of when the works will be completed and open for public use, and to commit to providing monthly progress updates on the Creative Victoria website.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:05): (1630) My question today is for the Minister for Planning. Shaylan, in my electorate, had started her dream business running a beauty salon in Carrum Downs called Beauty by Shaylan. Unfortunately, due to an oversight, it turned out that this area was zoned for hospitality only. As Libertarians we think that this kind of micromanaging of what businesses should be where is fundamentally flawed, but on this particular occasion it seems like madness. This business is popular and doing well, being surrounded by empty shops. There are opportunities for other businesses to operate there, and the residents can continue to enjoy the convenience of their favourite beauty salon. My question for the minister is: will you consider granting an exemption to the zoning requirements to allow Shaylan to continue operating her popular business?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): (1631) My question is to the Minister for the State Electricity Commission. Minister, what sites in my electorate will now be powered by the SEC? For the first time since the Liberals privatised the SEC – Labor brought it back – it is now going to sell electricity to Victoria once again. Next month the SEC will be powering Victoria's schools, hospitals, museums and trams with more clean, cheap, reliable, publicly owned renewable energy generated from wind and solar farms right across the state. It is going to power the Metro Tunnel when it begins operations later this year, while the SEC solar and battery storage facility and the SEC renewable energy park will drive down energy prices and slash emissions, ensuring Victoria is well on the way to hitting net zero by 2045.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:07): (1632) In my electorate in Geelong an early learning centre catering to children from six weeks to five years is in crisis. Shockingly, they have had to employ security contractors, not to protect against outsiders or even parents but to manage the behaviour of some of the children – behaviour including a four-year-old girl punching a staff member in the face. This is no nurturing environment, it is a war zone. Seriously, security contractors are policing early learning centres and kinders. This is not an isolated problem: I am told the primary school next door has been locked down multiple times. Primary school aged children are damaging cars and attacking people in the adjoining car park – really. What urgent measures will the minister implement to address this alarming breakdown in behaviour, support overwhelmed staff and ensure a safe learning environment for these young children and the broader school community?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:08): (1633) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. My constituent is a resident of Clyde North. He works 30 hours per week as a bus driver. My constituent spends many hours and takes four car trips to get to and from work. Public transport would help him get to work quicker and stress free. Victorian bus drivers can apply for a free public transport travel pass; however, my constituent was dismayed to discover that he does not qualify because he is not considered a full-time employee. In 2023 New South Wales changed their laws to provide free travel on public transport to all bus drivers, supporting the industry and incentivising more drivers to get behind the wheel. So my constituent asks: will the minister take New South Wales's lead and provide free travel passes to all bus drivers?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:09): (1634) My question is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. The coroner recommended that Victoria Police notify women when violent partners are released from prison, a simple and life-changing reform, yet VicPol has admitted it cannot deliver this due to lack of resources, and the government has taken no action to implement the recommendation. So my question is: can you confirm whether the government will act on the

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coroner's recommendation, and what steps are you taking to ensure that victims in my electorate are notified when their abusers are released?

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:09): (1635) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Many Geelong residents have shared with me their distress following the government's decision to approve Viva's floating gas terminal in Corio Bay. The Viva Energy gas terminal would be responsible for 600,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas pollution per year. It would lock in higher gas usage for decades and is inconsistent with Victoria's climate targets. Our community is calling for strong commitment to a net-zero goal through more incentives to transition towards efficient electrical appliances and solar power, including for businesses, landlords and low-income earners – not more gas. Could the minister please explain to my constituents how approving this project in Corio Bay is consistent with the government's renewable energy target of 95 per cent by 2035?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:10): (1636) My question is for the Minister for Police. Bentleigh East and Bentleigh have some of the highest crime rates in the City of Glen Eira, and the Glen Eira crime rate has increased by 7.5 per cent over previous years. We know Victorians are very frustrated with the government's inaction on a whole range of crime issues, but I particularly want to take note of what happened in Centre Road, Bentleigh, last week, where a jeweller was broken into twice in 24 hours. The store had been broken into – or there was an attempt to break in – three weeks prior to that. I mean, this is out of control. This family business, which is just trying to run its own business and do the right thing, is not getting any support from the Labor government. Crime is out of control. They feel abandoned. You have got Nick Staikos up one end of the road, Mr Batchelor down the other end. This is all falling on deaf ears for these two local members. The question I ask of the minister is: how will you stem the tide of rising crime to protect businesses that are closing their doors for good?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:11): (1637) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Residents in Gillingham Street, Watsonia North, have contacted me regarding the current works on the M80 ring-road interchange, just adjacent to their homes and the Gillingham Street playground. They are concerned that once these works are completed, they will be impacted by significant traffic noise, particularly given that the westbound ramp will be visible from their driveways. Given the large volume of car traffic on this road, they are concerned about noise pollution that will impact their health and wellbeing. Residents are reasonably requesting that a higher noise wall be constructed along an approximately 200-metre section close to Gillingham Street to block the line of sight of and noise coming from this ramp. It is my understanding that there are other parts of this road project where a 9-metre noise wall has been built, and I request that a similar and sufficiently high wall is built at Gillingham Street. Minister, will you commit to making sure that this boundary noise wall is high enough to block the noise and disturbance from the ramp on the M80 for residents of Gillingham Street?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:12): (1638) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it concerns 18 Windsor Avenue in Mount Waverley, opposite Jordanville station. I joined a community demonstration there on Thursday night at 6 pm. In the dark, in the cold, 65 people turned up to say enough is enough. A rooming house is being built there without a proper process. This is Labor's process. My question to the planning minister is: will you change the rules to ensure that, when a rooming house is going into a clearly suburban area, there is proper notification and proper advice? That is not what happened here. The City of Monash handed over a permit, having told only three households about this, and yet 500 or 600 households are going to be directly impacted. They will not say what people are going in there. Will there be prisoners going

in there? They will not say. And they will not say what is going to happen with traffic or parking. It is disgraceful, and the minister should change the rules.

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (14:14): (1639) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. In the early hours of Saturday morning a Toyota ute was stolen in Miners Rest. The victim, who was awoken by the engine, quickly raised the alarm with their housemate, who then jumped into another car and followed the stolen vehicle whilst on the phone to Triple Zero Victoria. Whilst following the vehicle, the victims were actually rammed by their own stolen car. Police found the stolen Toyota ute dumped in Wendouree a short time after the ramming incident occurred. My question to the minister is: why are you letting these sorts of things happen in Victoria – these incidents should not occur – and what are you going to do about stopping them? People are terrorised, and it does not seem like the government is even listening to this, let alone actually caring. So, Minister, what are you going to do to stop it?

Petitions

WorkCover

Sarah Mansfield (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 57 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the current WorkCover legislation in Victoria fails to protect workers who suffer psychological injuries caused by workplace bullying, harassment, and victimisation. These behaviours are not classified as legitimate workplace injuries, but rather as mental health conditions. As a result, victims are often forced to endure distressing symptoms for more than 12 months before becoming eligible for legal assistance. This delay puts vulnerable individuals at greater emotional, financial, and professional risk. It also empowers negligent workplaces to avoid accountability while the injured are left isolated and unsupported.

Despite employees commitment to their roles and colleagues, they often find themselves without protection after reporting mistreatment, and with no legal recourse as the harm escalated.

This is the reality for many workers across Victoria. Our laws must change to reflect modern workplace challenges. Psychological injuries must be recognised and treated with the same urgency and support as physical injuries. It's time for fairness.

The system currently fails to protect vulnerable workers, allowing negligent employers to escape accountability. Legislative changes are required to treat psychological and physical injuries equally. It's time to modernise our laws, provide early access to support, and ensure justice for those impacted by toxic workplace environments.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently reform legislation in relation to WorkCover to ensure psychological injuries caused by workplace bullying, harassment, and victimisation are recognised as legitimate workplace injuries.

Country Fire Authority Bellbrae station

Bev McArthur (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 317 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that mains water is not connected to the Bellbrae Country Fire Authority (CFA) station. The volunteer brigade plays a vital role in protecting residents in the region. The station is also a key staging area for the Otway Ranges in the event of a catastrophic bushfire, but the shocking reality is they don't have access to mains water.

Right now, volunteers have to drive into Torquay to fill up fire trucks for training, let alone for an emergency. If a major bushfire were to happen in the Otway again, fire trucks from all over western Victoria would be staged at the Bellbrae CFA station to fight the fires in the national park. Yet, the brigade doesn't have water on-site to support them. Even more frustrating is that 200 metres away Bellbrae Primary School has water, the Bellbrae Hall next door has water and the Bellbrae Recreation Reserve across the road is connected to mains water to maintain the oval grass.

The cost to connect water to the station is about \$100,000, a small amount to ensure the safety and peace of mind for the community.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to connect mains water service to the Bellbrae Country Fire Authority (CFA) station to support the incredible volunteers who work so hard to keep the community safe.

Honorary justices

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 5739 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the imminent collapse of Victoria's Honorary Justice System with less than 3,500 Justices of the Peace (JPs), many of whom are not active, serving a population of seven million. While Queensland has 80,000 and New South Wales has 75,800, Victoria's shortfall places additional strain on the already under-resourced police. Access to justice is further undermined by government-approved 'authorised witnesses' who, unlike JPs, often charge fees, lack training, and are not accountable.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council require the Attorney General to enact systemic change in the effectiveness and engagement of the Honorary Justices Services Support, resulting in the recruitment of 5000 new JPs by 2027 and 500 new JPs per annum, thereafter.

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

Dog management

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 111 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the urgent need to reduce accidental breeding, improve animal welfare, and address the overpopulation crisis in shelters and pounds by mandating desexing for all dogs used for breeding purposes at six years of age.

Female dogs used for breeding beyond six years of age face significant health risks, including uterine infections, difficult pregnancies, and early mortality. Yet many micro and backyard breeders continue to overbreed their animals, ignoring the welfare implications. Overbreeding and accidental litters contribute directly to the oversupply of animals, with many dogs abandoned, surrendered, or euthanised when shelters cannot cope with demand.

The introduction of mandatory desexing for breeding dogs by six years of age, subject to veterinary exceptions, would prevent further accidental litters and address overpopulation and abandonments. This reform is essential to protecting animal welfare, supporting responsible pet ownership, and reducing the burden on rehoming organisations.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to introduce legislation for mandatory desexing of all dogs used for breeding purposes by six years of age, including by micro and backyard breeders, unless medically inadvisable, and impose penalties for non-compliance.

Chelsea station pedestrian safety

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 1258 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws the attention of the Legislative Council the following regarding access between Chelsea station and the shops on Nepean Hwy:

1. Most Chelsea residents live east of the Station St/Frankston line/Nepean Hwy corridor. The shopping strip and beach are west of this corridor.
2. Chelsea station was rebuilt in 2021 as part of level crossing removals in the area.
3. The new station features a bus interchange, footbridge, lifts and central exits. A pedestrian crossing near these on the Station Street side was built.
4. However a pedestrian crossing adjacent to the footbridge, lifts and central station exit on the Nepean Hwy side was not built.
5. Instead people must backtrack via a narrow, unsheltered and unshaded fenced path to alternative pedestrian crossings well to the south or north.
6. Some people do not feel safe on this path or are physically unable to walk the added distance. Others jump the fence to avoid backtracking.

7. A direct crossing would increase visits to the shops, encourage activity especially amongst seniors and reduce risky fence-jumping.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council calls on the Government to build a signalised pedestrian crossing on Nepean Hwy Chelsea near the station's lift and footbridge to provide direct access to shops and services that residents and visitors need.

Rachel PAYNE: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills

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

Introduction and first reading

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:18): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, to establish a right to housing and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 8

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:19): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 8 of 2025, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulation Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Essential Services Commission – Public report on Port of Melbourne Market Rent Inquiry 2025, 20 April 2025.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to the Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No. 4/2025 (*Gazette G22, 29 May 2025*).

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

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendment C398.

Brimbank Planning Scheme – Amendment C244.

Darebin Planning Scheme – Amendment C210.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme – Amendment C267.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme – Amendment C263.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendments C475 and C478.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C480.

Moyne Planning Scheme – Amendment C83.

Port Phillip Planning Scheme – Amendments C223 and C226.

Queenscliffe Planning Scheme – Amendment C40.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme – Amendment C258.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C207.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 – No. 46.

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – No. 41.

Electricity Safety Act 1998 – No. 40.

Forests Act 1958 – No. 42.

Land Act 1958 – No. 43.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 – No. 47.

National Parks Act 1975 – No. 44.

Partnership Act 1958 – No. 39.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Nos. 37 and 48.

Tobacco Act 1987 – No. 38.

Wildlife Act 1975 – No. 45.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 28, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 45.

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

Dairy Food Safety Victoria Determination of licence classes and fees for dairy businesses 2025 under the Dairy Act 2000.

Ministerial Order No. 1468 – Order Amending Ministerial Order No. 1125 – Procedures for Suspension and Expulsion of Students in Government Schools under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006.

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No. 7/2025 (*Gazette S259, 28 May 2025*).

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the response of the Minister for Energy and Resources to the petition titled ‘Stop the ban on gas appliances’ and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety’s response to the petition titled ‘Upgrade the Donnybrook Road bridge’.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:36): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 18 June 2025:

- (1) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell on hardship funding for farmers;

- (3) notice of motion given this day by Georgie Crozier on ambulance transfer data at Northern Hospital;
- (4) notice of motion 892 standing in Evan Mulholland's name on the location of the SBS headquarters; and
- (5) notice of motion given this day by me on road management on the Princes Freeway.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Reporting dates

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (14:36): I move, by leave:

That the reporting date for the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into Ambulance Victoria be extended to no later than 14 October 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Travis Lovett

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:37): Today I want to honour Gunditjmara man Travis Lovett. As deputy chair and commissioner of the Yoorrook Justice Commission he and all at the commission have been listening to and documenting historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Nations people in Victoria. With the substantive work of the commission almost concluded, he is leading a Walk for Truth from Portland all the way to the steps of this Parliament. I was honoured to take part in the Mount Noorat leg of the walk on Sunday 1 June, and I learned more of the true history of where I am from and acknowledge that many places represent a history of trauma and sadness for First Nations people. The walk has been a powerful and a positive way to build shared understanding of these truths for all of us. I congratulate Travis and all the First Nations people involved in the Walk for Truth. It has been a truly positive and constructive message journey all the way through western Victoria, which is also my electorate.

Barry Traynor OAM

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:38): I rise to honour Barry Edward Traynor, awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the King's Birthday honours for service to police welfare and to the Parliament of Victoria. I was delighted to hear of Barry's nomination and in fact proud to be asked to support it. This is exactly what our national honours system is for – recognising people whose selfless service and quiet dedication have made a lasting difference to others. Barry served with Victoria Police for over 30 years, rising to the rank of inspector. He won four chief commissioner's commendations, the National Medal and the Victoria Police Service Medal for diligent and ethical service. From 1992 to 1999 he represented Ballarat East in this Parliament as a proud Liberal member, including service on the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. He then returned to Victoria Police until retiring in 2002. Perhaps his greatest contribution has come in retirement through tireless volunteer work with police veterans, particularly through Police Veterans Victoria, providing vital support to retired officers facing post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety. He helps them stay connected, access assistance and live full lives beyond the badge. Barry Traynor has spent a lifetime in service, and I am thrilled to see that recognised with this most distinguished award.

Duck hunting

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:40): The final long weekend of Victoria's 2025 duck-shooting season ended as it started – reportedly quiet, with very few shooters. To prop up this cruel practice for just 0.2 per cent of Victoria's population is a shocking misuse of public funds, and it locks up public land. As Laurie Levy and the tireless campaigners at Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting have shown, this barbarism not only wastes public funds, it routinely results in the

suffering of protected and threatened species, with injured birds left to die slowly, and the terrorising of native wildlife. Regional communities, particularly those living near wetlands, have had enough. The noise, violence and disruption caused by duck shooting does not support local economies – it drives visitors and locals away, out of their wetlands. In towns like Kerang and Camperdown families are demanding peace on their wetlands and an end to the seasonal invasion by shooters. A far more sustainable and positive approach would be keeping these wetlands open to communities and visitors year round and investing in a thriving, nature-based tourism industry. Polling shows that the public agrees that duck shooting is out of step with our values. Victoria has the opportunity to follow the science, community sentiment and common sense by making the 2025 season the last. It is time to protect our precious wetlands and not treat them as sites of slaughter.

James ‘Jimmy’ Mentor

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:41): Today I rise to mark and acknowledge the life of James Mentor, better known as Jimmy. Jimmy was a Labor diehard, a Collingwood superfan and a dedicated and brilliant staffer to Senator Ciccone. Most of all, though, he was a great and decent bloke. When I heard the news of Jimmy’s passing last week, it did not feel real. I did not want to accept it, and frankly it still does not feel real. Jimmy was one of those people who had time for everyone. Nothing was too much to ask, and he enriched the lives of everyone around him. I first met Jimmy when I was a fresh-faced member of Young Labor.

David Davis: You’re still fresh-faced.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Mr Davis. He had recently aged out but was always happy to help the next generation. He was always happy to lend a hand and was always up for a chat. I know I speak for many in this building and across the political landscape when I say that we will all miss him very dearly. I extend my condolences directly to the Mentor family, to Jimmy’s friends and colleagues and to all of those who have been impacted by his tragic and untimely passing. He has been taken from us way too soon. Jimmy was the epitome of true Labor values, and it is in that light that I and so many others will fondly remember him. Vale, Jimmy Mentor.

Middle East conflict

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): We are all watching the Middle East with great care and concern at the moment. We know that Iran is a state that has been seeking nuclear weapons. We know that Israel has for many years, for many decades, now been surrounded by sworn enemies, and Iran has been the most prominent amongst those. Iran has sponsored effectively state terrorism through Hezbollah, the Hamas group and more recently the Houthis further south. The truth is that I think many in this chamber are very concerned for obviously the people in Iran but the people in Israel too who are subject to what is going on at the moment. I do not believe Israel had much choice. I believe they had to take the actions they have taken, and I wish them well in those actions, in ensuring that there is no nuclear capacity left in Iran. I think there is still some way to go in that. Mr Netanyahu, while some may not appreciate him, I think will be seen in retrospect as somebody who has been prepared to stand up for Israel’s future and to guarantee peace and security. I stand with Israel, I know that they have been surrounded by enemies, and I believe they had to strike out and strike back and to ensure that nuclear capacity was not able to be achieved by Iran.

MHA Care

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (14:45): My members statement today is dedicated to the tireless and hardworking staff and volunteers of MHA Care. Located in the very north of my electorate, with their headquarters based in Cobram, the organisation has eight shopfronts and four share tables providing food and staples to those in need, from Yarrawonga to Barmah and as far north as Finley into New South Wales and down to Numurkah and its smaller surrounding towns. Around 4500 people utilise the services this organisation provides, while maintaining dignity and discretion during their time of hardship. I had the pleasure of visiting the Cobram and Numurkah branches last

week and was given a thorough run-down of how it all works, thanks to CEO Michael Hogan, FoodShare coordinator James Rouel and Numurkah manager Deb Fowler. Their dedication to ensuring their community's vulnerable members have assistance is amazing and is a testament to the caring and compassionate qualities of the management, staff and volunteers of MHA Care.

Triple Zero Victoria

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:46): Last Friday the coroner handed down the findings into the tragic death of Christina Lackmann, who died in 2021 following failures in the ambulance system and Triple Zero for her to be attended to. It took 7 hours for anyone to attend to Ms Lackmann, and as the coroner said in his findings, there were multiple systemic issues as a result of what occurred on that night in May of 2021. In his findings he said:

The public hospital system's capacity to clear ambulance resources was also extremely challenged. On this evening, there were significant delays at Monash Medical Centre (Clayton), and the Royal Melbourne, St Vincent's, Sunshine, Austin and Northern Hospitals. Health services have a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to offload 90% of ambulance patients within 40 minutes of arrival at the hospital. On 21 April 2021 –

that is the night I am referring to –

this benchmark was achieved only 57.3% of the time.

Nothing has changed since that time. Just a couple of weeks ago a man in Blackburn rang 000 twice. He bled to death because no ambulances were available. Shame on Labor. Shame on this Allan Labor government for not fixing this very critical system.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (14:48): I was proud to speak at a rally convened in Ballarat over the weekend squarely aimed at ending the emergency services tax. CFA volunteers, FRV members, United Firefighters Union members, farmers and regional communities gathered in Victoria Park in Ballarat to send a very clear message to the government: scrap the tax. A convoy of over a hundred trucks toured Ballarat, going past both the member for Eureka's office and the member for Wendouree's office. Despite both being invited, they both declined to attend the rally and listen to their constituents. I want to acknowledge the work of Alistair Cousins and Cate Lancashire, who did a great job organising the rally, along with Andrew Weidemann, Cr Rob Armstrong and of course my colleague Mrs McArthur, who attended the event as well. The message is clear: scrap the tax. The problem with this government is they just will not listen.

Wyndham AI for Business program

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:48): Last week I had the pleasure of joining Wyndham City Council and RMIT University college of business and law alongside local businesses for the launch of the Wyndham AI for Business program at the SPARK business and innovation hub in Werribee. This AI hub initiative is a long-term establishment between Wyndham City Council and RMIT, with a dedicated space for training and ongoing consulting designed to address shared business challenges and drive new learning and growth opportunities in the region. Interactive activities are designed to engage local business communities and explore how artificial intelligence can be applied to solve business challenges and to keep one step ahead of the competition. I want to say congratulations to Wyndham City Council and RMIT University on this groundbreaking partnership, which will provide businesses in the Wyndham area with affordable access to advanced training, consulting and resourcing of artificial intelligence for businesses.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion**

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:50): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 943, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Gayle Tierney:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:50): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. This is a regular bill that comes through concurrent with the budget. It was a little bit delayed this year by the government's games and duckshoving at the start, but it has come through. The government has tried to say with this bill that there are no particular new taxes in it. Whilst on one level there are not any brand spanking new taxes of scale or substance, that is because the government brought through the big, new, nasty taxes in bills a couple of weeks earlier. They brought through the emergency services tax, that big whopper new tax that is going to hit Victorians very hard, the tax that will see people in the country pay much more but also people in the city pay more in their so-called emergency services levy, which will increase massively for many people in the city.

If you own a rental property, if you own a commercial property or if you own a farm in the country, you will pay much, much more. But even regular householders, those who own homes, will likely pay 60 to 80 per cent, maybe in some cases 100 per cent, more in the actual payments that they are making year on year. I would urge Victorians to look closely at their council rate notices when they come, because those council rate notices will show the size of that new tax. It is called a levy, but it is really a three-letter word: it is a tax – there is no question about that – and it is applied to property across the state. If you are a renter, you will not see that bill, but it will go to your landlord and there is no question that over time rents will rise in reflection of those new and additional charges that are being made.

It is important in context to say that it is not just that new levy, but there is a whole raft of new charges and levies that the state government is bringing forward in my own portfolio area of energy. We have seen these 234 per cent increases proposed by government for the levies and charges to be applied on mining and resource extraction. For example, even prospectors who go out on the weekend will pay more for a miner's licence to the tune of 234 per cent. Those who are wanting to go and get a mining permit more broadly – a commercial-scale mining permit – will pay 234 per cent more. Those who want works permits for extraction or mining will pay about 234 per cent more under the government's proposals. Even the resources sector – for example, quarries where rock is extracted and used as a significant input into concrete and homes – will see its levies by government go up by 234 per cent.

What I am saying is that there have been more than 61 new taxes, charges and levies or expansions of them by this government over the last 14 years. We now have the highest level of state taxation in the country, and that is feeding directly through into the cost of living. It is no wonder that the standard of living of Victorians has been falling. It is no wonder that household income and income per head has been falling over the last few years under this government. They are taxing the state into a position where it is very hard to undertake business, it is very hard to expand and it is very hard to have your business turn a decent profit.

The truth of the matter is that as we make the state less attractive, less significant investment is likely to come to this state than would otherwise have been the case, and that is a very big concern. We see interstate migration – not net migration into the state, because we have a very significant flow of people from overseas, but interstate migration – has swung heavily into the negative in Victoria’s case since the days of COVID and has not been restored. Extraordinarily we have not actually gone back to the pattern that we have had since – and I will give the date to the chamber – 1997, when net interstate migration actually swung into the positive for Victoria under the Kennett government. It is the Allan and Andrews governments that have actually made it very difficult for the state and made it very clear in this state that more people want to leave than go into the state, in terms of people from other states and territories. That is an important context to this bill. This is a bill which we will make some significant amendments to, and it might be worth circulating those amendments at this point.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

David DAVIS: The main provisions of the bill include amendments to the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, with the introduction of provisional determination allowing the commissioner to assess whether land has a qualifying use, particularly where valuation details are outdated or unavailable. This is one of those small changes that actually will disadvantage some commercial operations. It is designed to give a greater whip hand to the commissioner.

The amendments to the Duties Act 2000 relate to subdivided tax reform scheme land, clarifying how duty operations apply in specific subdivision scenarios, and the introduction of an exemption for first home buyers who have been the victims of family violence, waiving certain conditions traditionally associated with duty concessions. Those changes are supported strongly by the opposition, so we do indicate to the government that we support that set of changes that relate to victims of family violence.

There are, as I say, amendments to the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000, with exemptions allowing applicants affected by family violence to access first home owner grants despite previous ownership or entitlement conditions typically preventing eligibility.

There are also some amendments to the Land Tax Act 2005 – an expansion of exemptions for principal place of residence, specifically accommodating victims of family violence who have temporarily vacated their property, and this is only a fair change in my humble view. There are modifications of build-to-rent property criteria to clarify when dwellings qualify for land tax benefits and a test addressing temporary unavailability due to repairs and refurbishments. This, we think is only a fair change.

There are amendments to the Payroll Tax Act 2007. There is refinement of the definition of regional employees to provide clearer guidelines on payroll tax eligibility for regional businesses.

There are amendments to the Taxation Administration Act 1997, with the introduction of a higher penalty tax rate up to 50 per cent for taxpayer or agent recklessness concerning obligations under tax laws intended to enhance compliance. This is a new piece of weaponry – the new bazooka that the State Revenue Office has sought to avail itself of. There are already penalties at 25 per cent and 75 per cent. I am not sure why they needed this new –

Harriet Shing interjected.

David DAVIS: It is a cudgel, exactly. Let us record that the minister called it a cudgel, and I think that that is an appropriate –

Harriet Shing interjected.

David DAVIS: You did say.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, President, I would hate to have words attributed to me in the context that Mr Davis has sought to have them attributed, and that in and of itself constitutes a

misleading of the house. Me saying one word out loud, Mr Davis, is not an endorsement of your position.

David DAVIS: On the point of order, President, I responded to the interjection. It was not my idea to use the word ‘cudgel’. That was an idea that came directly from the minister, and I picked it up by way of a response to the interjection and indicated that I thought it was an appropriate description. A cudgel to clobber taxpayers – that is exactly what it is, President. The Treasurer wants another stick –

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure if this is part of the contribution or –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: President, I was responding to the interjection.

The PRESIDENT: I am not sure how to respond to any of these points of order. I think the minister was pretty clear in her position, so I will ask Mr Davis to continue.

David DAVIS: There are many things I would say about the minister, but she is a person who is aware of many words and can often find a suitable word for the occasion. This was such an occasion where she spontaneously – it just came out. It was clearly because it is such an appropriate word for this new lever, this new device that the Treasurer has put in the bill to hound and chase taxpayers. That is what it is. There are already many, many levers, but they want more.

On the Unclaimed Money Act 2008, the bill empowers the registrar of unclaimed money to issue repayment notices where previously paid claims are later deemed incorrect. There are amendments, as I said, to the Taxation Administration Act. There are amendments to the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972, removal of redundant schedules and simplification. These are all important points.

I just want to, as an issue of version control, ensure that I have exactly the right version of the bill that was distributed. As the government will well be aware, there are a number of points in our amendments. One is to deal with the new penalty rate for recklessness and the cudgel, as it were, and to try and remove this new and extraordinary cudgel that is sought to be put into the act through this bill. We seek to take it out. We seek to keep the arrangements fairer for taxpayers. We think the government has enough devices, levers and cudgels; it does not need more.

Harriet Shing interjected.

David DAVIS: No, I am simply making the point that we will seek to remove these changes.

The second set of changes relates to matters that seek an exemption. There has been discussion between the government and opposition in the form of the Treasurer and the Shadow Treasurer regarding the issue of proper exemptions where there are floods or other extraordinary circumstances. These words have been modified after discussion with the government, hence my desire to make sure I have the right version in front of me. It was a case of good discussion across the aisle. An amendment I think has been framed which can be agreed across the chamber, and we would suggest that that is a good process that has occurred here. Mr Newbury suggested very strongly – with, I might add, the specific input of the Deputy President Ms Lovell, who was a very strong advocate – that where there are floods or other natural disasters affecting taxpayers there should be some reasonable relief. That is the purpose of that amendment. I will leave our response to the other amendments which I understand are to be moved – some by the government, some by the Greens and some by Mr Limbrick – until later when they have moved those amendments. I will respond at that point.

The context of this bill, as I said at the start, is important. There have been massive increases in taxes under this government – new and expanded taxes, novel taxes, taxes that disturb and disadvantage business and taxpayers, and regulatory fees that have been increased as well. It is a range of new imposts and charges, and I think it is important in this context to see that Victoria is not only the most heavily taxed jurisdiction in the country but also the most heavily regulated. That is making us very, very uncompetitive, and that is a long-term problem for our state. Whilst there are a number of items

in this bill that we agree with – and I have identified those quite closely – there are some amendments that we are seeking to make. I understand that at least one of those amendments is likely to meet with support from the government and support more broadly from across the chamber. I think that covers the matters I needed to cover.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:07): I too will speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. This bill touches on a wide range of areas, but what connects all of the provisions in this bill is a theme of fairness. I want to mention just very briefly and summarise some of the changes that are being made before going into one area of the bill.

The bill makes changes to support people who have to leave their homes due to family violence. We know it is overwhelmingly women and children that experience that situation, but not entirely. It extends the off-the-plan stamp duty concession. It makes changes to support build-to-rent developments. It provides more security for renters and broadens eligibility for accessing the vacant land conservation covenant account. The bill marks a shift away from up-front stamp duty towards a more flexible, ongoing land tax. It fixes a number of other technical issues, such as with trust notifications, so that land tax is calculated fairly and accurately. We are making sure that people who have to leave their homes due to illness or a loved one's passing do not lose their partial principal residence exemption. We are also fixing a problem that has affected some regional businesses. Right now if a business operates mostly in regional Victoria but some of its workers do a bit of work interstate, they can lose access to the regional payroll tax rate, and that is not fair. This bill will change that so that only time worked in Victoria is counted when determining eligibility. That means businesses that are genuinely regional will not be penalised for having drivers travel across the border or sales reps pop into, you know, Adelaide. That is somewhat of a summary of some of the changes.

The change I want to focus on in my speech is the one relating to family violence, and I want to focus on what I think are the most important changes in this bill: support for people who have had to leave their home due to family violence. People fleeing family violence often face immediate and overwhelming financial constraints. Leaving a violent relationship can mean losing access to shared bank accounts, income or even basic necessities like housing and transport. Many victim-survivors, especially and most often women and children, are forced to start from scratch, often without savings, employment or a safe place to stay. The cost of temporary accommodation, legal support, setting up a new household and meeting day-to-day living expenses can be enormous. The evidence shows that overwhelmingly those escaping violence and abuse are women and children, but these changes will also assist all survivors in these types of situations. What is more, financial systems, including the tax system, can unintentionally penalise them. These systemic barriers can be a significant cause of women staying in unsafe situations – situations that might then delay their recovery or their ability to escape.

Ensuring that our laws account for the lived reality of people escaping family violence is essential if we are serious about safety, fairness and financial justice. Right now if someone had had access to the first home owners grant or stamp duty exemptions to buy a home with a partner and then had to flee due to violence, they could lose their eligibility. They are treated as if they have already had their one shot. That does not seem fair, particularly given the circumstances. It punishes people who have already been through trauma and discourages them from leaving unsafe situations. This bill changes that. It means that if someone has to leave their home because of family violence and they do not benefit from the property, they will be able to access those supports again. So where that person does not get the rental income, does not see capital gains and does not get to live in the property that they have had to flee, they are treated as if they had never bought the property in the first place. They will be eligible again for the \$10,000 first home owner grant on a new home, and they will be eligible for the full stamp duty exemption on homes under \$600,000 or concession on homes up to \$750,000. This is about dignity, it is about rebuilding and it is about recognising that sometimes good tax policy can be about gender. Good tax policy should always reflect our values as a society and a Victorian

community. A further change ensures that if they are still listed as the owner on the home that they have fled and they are not making any money from it they will not be hit with land tax either.

For too long the tax office has perceived itself as a gender-free zone. In the 1990s the sector argued to the Department of Treasury and Finance that family violence is an economic issue, costing Victoria and Victorians money. At the time the sector was seeking more secure funding for family violence and sexual assault services across the state. Put more brutally, these amendments will prevent the tax office from being intrinsically implicit in the oppression of women, removing these property barriers from consideration for women who are planning to leave a violent or abusive relationship. This is the right thing to do. These are practical, decent changes. They are about giving victim-survivors of family violence a fair go. No-one should be punished for protecting themselves or their kids. So this bill is an important demonstration of the value of a multilens analysis – that is my made-up phrase – critically looking at longstanding financial and tax assumptions from the perspectives of vulnerable and diverse Victorians. For that reason, I commend the bill to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:15): I am also pleased to talk on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. I will start from the outset by saying that the Libertarian Party will not be opposing this bill. Overall my understanding is it results in a slightly lower tax take, and on that basis I will not be opposing it. In fact it does a couple of good things, which I will go through in a moment.

I would note, as pointed out by Mr Davis earlier, the big tax that was recently put through by the government: the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. Nonetheless, this bill – firstly, some of the good things that it does. One thing is it extends the new stamp duty concessions from 12 months to two years. Those that were watching would know that the Libertarians attempted to extend that to make it permanent. It appears that the government decided that one year was not long enough – and I agree with the government that one year was not long enough – so the government is going to two years. I do have an amendment, which we will get to at a later point. In the interests of compromise, I will attempt to make it 10 years, instead of forever, and maybe we can get to some sort of agreement to that amongst the chamber.

Another thing that this bill does which is very good is extend provisions on tax exemptions to people in domestic violence situations. This is undoubtedly a good thing. I note that there are some amendments from the opposition that the government has indicated it may agree to, and I will look at them carefully when they come through, when we go through the committee stage. But nonetheless I am generally supportive of these exemptions as well.

The main concern that I have with this bill – and it is not a deal breaker, but it is a concern nonetheless – is around the new penalty rate. There are penalty rates for taxes that have not been collected for various reasons, and currently there is a 25 per cent penalty rate and a 75 per cent penalty rate. I have been informed that the 75 per cent rate is very rarely used, as my understanding is it is basically for things that are verging on criminality, and therefore the bar is very high. The government want to introduce a new, intermediate rate of 50 per cent for what they are calling reckless conduct. I am a little bit concerned about how that may be used. I think the term ‘cudgel’ was used before.

Harriet Shing interjected.

David LIMBRICK: Yes. I am a bit concerned about how this might actually be used, and I have got some questions for the committee stage on that. But nonetheless it is not actually putting in a higher rate than what currently exists, because the existing highest rate is 75 per cent. Therefore I do not see a good reason to oppose this. There are other things that this bill does, some of them just tweaks and technical things. The main thing, around extending the stamp duty concessions, is undoubtedly a good thing, and providing exemptions to people who are suffering family violence situations is also a very good thing. On that basis, the Libertarian Party will not be opposing this bill.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:18): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. In doing so, speaking on it in 2025, I again reiterate that in effect it impacts a number of tax-related acts: the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Unclaimed Money Act 2008 and the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972.

As we have heard from the lead speaker from the Liberals and Nationals Mr Davis, this bill has many technical and administrative elements to it, which are relatively uncontroversial. But indeed some of the aspects of the bill require further scrutiny and indeed amendment, and those in particular are about victim-survivors of family violence and adjustments to clarify their obligations and, in addition, for trusts and build-to-rent properties. There are some that certainly need looking at. And what we have seen in the government over the past decade is an interest in taxing people. The interest that the interest in taxing is creating in this state is in the forward estimates: we see a debt of upwards of \$190 billion. Indeed that interest payment on an hourly rate will end up being somewhere in the vicinity of \$1.3 million in interest payments alone. That will be a frightening, frightening occurrence and eventuality if this government is not drawn in and if it is not replaced in 2026.

This bill does amend the Duties Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005 and other taxation acts; it introduces new compliance frameworks, new exemptions and new penalty rates; and it removes or modifies existing entitlements and thresholds. One of the parts to the bill that we heard Acting President Ermacora speak to was in relation to family and domestic violence. It amends the first home owner grant and home buyer scheme so that exemptions allow applicants affected and impacted by the scourge of family violence to actually have access to first home owner grants, despite in many cases having entered into an arrangement before in their previous relationship that would have then prevented them access in the future. So there is recognition of the impact of that domestic violence on – and it is not always but it is overwhelmingly and regularly – women and then subsequently children and families. It also amends the Land Tax Act for the expansion of exemptions for principal places of residence, specifically accommodating those victims of family violence who have had to vacate their property.

Doing a little bit of research in relation to domestic violence, it is so alarming and concerning that still nationwide 21 per cent of Australians have experienced family violence or domestic violence, emotional abuse or economic abuse by a partner. Specifically in Victoria, 27 per cent of women – that is almost 3 million, 2.7 million women – have experienced partner violence since the age of 15, and 15 per cent of men, or 1.5 million, have also experienced the same. That is frightening, isn't it, when we consider the impact on lives, livelihoods, ability to get through the day – those sorts of imposts – and the pain and trauma that is caused through domestic violence. And it is no surprise that in Victoria 49 per cent – so half – of our domestic violence victims report the offender being an intimate partner, that first partner. That is why some of the changes to this legislation are important.

Also what we know and what is most concerning is that Victoria's response is certainly falling short, in particular in relation to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Safe and Equal, a respected organisation, put in a budget submission only a few months ago to the state government in relation to what they want to see, and some of their quotes in that particular budget submission indicate that without long-term, sustainable funding, the specialist family violence sector cannot meet current or future demand. This puts victim-survivors at risk and undermines the progress made since the royal commission. They are advocating for additional funds. They are concerned that our numbers are tracking in the wrong direction. Indeed in my own Eastern Victoria electorate unfortunately – and again, these are no metrics that anybody, any sane person, would rejoice in; indeed it is a very sad situation – there are areas in my electorate that are suffering on a statewide comparison, and certainly more needs to be done in that space. The bill introduces new land tax exemptions, as I have said, and looks at those disaster-affected individuals. The important thing that Mr Davis has tabled and discussed on behalf of the Nationals and the Liberals is certain amendments in relation to having that

ability for further exemptions, particularly if domestic violence victims have left their primary homes and/or because of a natural disaster. I believe that there has been some positive discussion with the government looking to adopt some of those recommendations through the amendments.

What we also know is that it is tougher than ever to get a first home, whether you are someone who, very sadly, is experiencing domestic violence or whether you are a first home buyer. I know the Nationals' and the Liberals' fantastic new policy is up, with exemptions from stamp duty for first home buyers purchasing established or off-the-plan properties up to a threshold of \$1 million, so I congratulate the team there for that. That looks at saving somewhere between \$40,000 and \$50,000 on a home. We know that the cost of homes is going up and up. Even in regional Victoria the median price is getting, in many locations, well above that \$600,000 to \$650,000 for a home.

While the Nationals certainly are not opposing this bill, we do acknowledge that people have been suffering under this government over the last 10 years. There have been no fewer than 60 new or increased taxes, and half of them are on property. It is no wonder that the lines, in a variety of ways, to get a home are just getting longer and longer for so many Victorians. This is not a budget reform; in effect this is just another blunder that this government keeps winding us into. We have seen the introduction of the windfall gains tax, a vacant residential land tax, a cladding rectification tax. Do not forget the COVID debt levy and the mental health and wellbeing surcharge. All of these are impacting Victorians in a way that is unsustainable. We even saw the Auditor-General back in 2022 talk about the debt continuing to rise faster than revenue and economic growth, increasing the cost of servicing that debt. The government has not yet outlined a clear plan for how and when it will repay existing and future debt.

We heard the Treasurer today during question time endorsing and certainly supporting the words of the Victorian Auditor-General in her contribution. She needs to have a listen and reflect on some of the very valid comments that the Auditor-General has made in the past about this government's spiralling debt and those comments my very vigilant and strident Shadow Minister for Mental Health has made on that mental health levy. This is a billion dollars a year coming into the government coffers. It is supposed to be addressing those issues arising from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – it is supposed to be doing that – and yet we see, particularly in my patch, the government shutting down services and siphoning off funding, pinching it, ringbarking funding into the health assembly in our patch. Those organisations look to support people with domestic violence. On one hand they are saying, 'Look, we'll put this bill through.' On another hand they are cutting off funding that supports victims of domestic violence. I congratulate my colleague Emma Kealy for being so strident in her position and her views of supporters of domestic violence.

The other thing, in summation on this bill, and we heard our lead speaker Mr Davis speak about it, is the impact on regional Victorians of so many taxes – the cumulative land tax burden that we are facing through this. We also heard him speak about the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, and that always sticks in my neck when I have to say 'volunteers fund' for the correct title. It is a tax, it is a de facto tax and we have seen the Victorian Farmers Federation and the chair of Rural Councils Victoria go in hard and oppose this impost which affects all Victorians whether you own a house, a business, run an industry or you are a rental provider. It will impact renters in the future, absolutely. But also, no more is it felt than in country Victoria, where this government is imposing a 150 per cent increase on the previous levy. And a stay of execution for one year just will not wash – it is unacceptable.

I was interested in Ms Ermacora's discussion around the amendment to payroll tax, part 6 of this bill, looking at the refinement of definitions around 'regional employees' to provide clearer guidelines on payroll eligibility for regional businesses and addressing those which were ambiguous. When she spoke about communities, she has got her border community, and I certainly have mine in Eastern Victoria as well. One of the key factors that pains me to understand as I speak with former businesses that were involved in the native timber industry – our world-class, sustainable native timber industry – is that I know that those businesses have had to close and collapse, and while they are trying to keep

those communities like Orbost alive they are, on a regular occasion, having to send their diminished staff into New South Wales, up the Monaro or over into Eden or further, in order to continue to pay their staff and keep that community alive and keep the small schools alive in those regions.

You have these communities that are suffering because of this government's flawed policies over the last decade. You see a slither of acknowledgement of that, where you have a government that has shut down an industry, causing pain in our regional communities, and now it is saying, 'Okay, we'll ensure, at the very least, that if you are going to have your workers retained in those communities, we'll whack you for payroll tax as long as you're working in this state. But when you have to go interstate to find some funds, we accept that.' That is minimal at best. Farmers in towns like Lang Lang and Nyora are struggling with inflated land values. We see Wonthaggi and Inverloch small business owners and retirees are also having impost over impost from this particular government.

The Nationals will not oppose this bill. We endorse our combined amendments. What we also are very concerned about – and we heard it through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – is that the government is now using its Treasurer's advance, and at last count it was \$12 billion worth of Treasurer's advances for core government services. It is going to continue that and continue to drive that debt that your children's children will be funding.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:33): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. This makes adjustment to eight pieces of legislation allowing the government to implement several of the budget commitments announced in May. One important change this bill makes is that it takes the existing temporary stamp duty concession for off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses and extends it for another year. The extension of this concession was a big part of May's budget, and it is perhaps the biggest single aspect of the bill, which covers changes being made to many different pieces of legislation across the tax code. So it is fitting for me to cover this particular change first.

This is a concession that was first announced in October 2024 and which was extended in May's budget. It will remain valid on eligible properties until October 2026, an extension of 12 months. Prior to October 2024, the concession was value capped and only applied to first home buyers and owner-occupiers. The announcement in 2024 that any Victorian looking to purchase off the plan would be eligible for the concessions is important. The more we can incentivise people to look towards buying off the plan rather than competing for existing homes, the more we can incentivise developers to build new homes. This means that this change is directly addressing both housing affordability and housing supply. One of the reasons why this concession is so important is because it will have meaningful effect on helping people to buy off the plan and therefore incentivising developers to build more houses. But because it is targeted specifically at off-the-plan purchases, it places the tax relief where it is needed the most to achieve our desired outcomes. It does this by incentivising the construction of more homes rather than just pushing up the prices of existing homes without adding any value. Remember, building more homes also benefits those who want to buy an existing home – when everybody has more choice and more options, they will not have to compete with so many people over each existing home. Premier Allan wants to be the Premier who gets millennials into homes, and that requires getting more homes built.

Some other important parts of the bill include the changes made to the regulations around build-to-rent. Currently the Victorian government gives build-to-rent developers a 50 per cent reduction in the taxable value of their land on eligible developments; in some cases they also receive a 30-year exemption from the absentee owner surcharge. The tax incentive is one of the Allan Labor government's policy settings which has made Melbourne Australia's built-to-rent capital. As of last year three-quarters of the completed build-to-rent projects across Australia were located in Melbourne. One example of a fantastic build-to-rent project is the Greystar project on Yarra and Claremont streets in South Yarra, located in the Southern Metropolitan Region, which I visited last year with the Minister for Planning in the other place. It is a project which delivers 617 high-quality homes near public transport, near shops, near services, near the CBD and, crucially, in a location with existing

infrastructure in place to support an influx of new residents. We on this side of the chamber know how important build-to-rent is, and that is why this bill makes life easier for the developers and gives people more choice as tenants, because sometimes a small change like that can go a long way towards giving people more choice, more autonomy and more security.

This bill does not seek to make sweeping changes to the existing set of incentives but instead adjusts some of their precise terms to ensure that they are promoting secure, long-term rental housing. In short, we are giving the developers new rights but also new responsibilities. As such, in order for developers to benefit from the build-to-rent incentives tenants must receive lease term offers of three years or longer. It is acceptable for tenants to request shorter lease terms, but the developers would have to demonstrate that this was the tenant's preference through the signing of a joint declaration. Further, because build-to-rent projects exist to provide secure, long-term rental housing, this bill changes the law on this. It prohibits lease terms of less than 12 months in build-to-rent housing through providing exemptions in limited circumstances. Also this bill gives the Commissioner of State Revenue the power to allow temporarily uninhabitable properties to maintain their build-to-rent benefits under certain circumstances; these include unforeseeable circumstances such as natural disasters and other reasonable circumstances such as planned refurbishments.

Build-to-rent is all about security and choice in housing. Some people want or need stability to be able to stay in one place for a longer period of time but either do not have the means to purchase a house of their own or would just prefer not to. Everyone's circumstances are unique, and long-term private rentals are an important tool to have in our housing arsenal, because renters deserve to have a choice when they decide where they want to live. That is why it is important that the government provide tax incentives to build-to-rent, and that is why small changes like we are including in this bill are important, to make it easier for the people who build homes to build and maintain them. That is also why it is important that the government always looks out for renters' rights and puts into law that renters in build-to-rent properties are entitled to lease terms of at least three years, giving them security and giving them choice. With that, I will leave my contribution there.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:39): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. This bill amends various Victorian taxation-related acts, including the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024, the Land Tax Act 2005 and the Unclaimed Money Act 2008. It impacts multiple taxation acts regarding taxation administration and compliance, and the bill also institutes a penalty taxation rate for reckless noncompliance, which is arguably a new taxation measure, and that is what this government loves to do – they love to tax, tax and tax. We have had over 60 new or increased taxes since this government came to power. When I think back – I have been in now for 2½ years – I remember early on looking at the interest payments every day being about \$15 million every single day. Now we have seen in the recent budget in a few years we are heading towards a much, much higher amount of \$29 million every single day just in interest. The debt we are heading towards in this state is \$194 billion. Now, that is extraordinary. So what do we get for it? As David Davis pointed out, we are the highest taxed state. But it would be good to know where the money is going, because at the moment our state is in a huge hole. It is like a vortex: there is lots of money going into the coffers and lots of new taxes being introduced, but there is certainly not much to show for it.

When you look at our roads – and there has been a lot of news coverage over a long period of time – our roads are falling apart in regional areas. Certainly the Calder up to Bendigo is nice and smooth for the most part, but when you deviate off that onto other roads across our state you will see a very different picture. We know our health system is under pressure. And when you look at housing, we do have a housing crisis in Victoria, and it is certainly burdened by property taxes. But with roads, as I mentioned, there have been a number of media reports. I know my Nationals colleague Kim O'Keeffe, member for Shepparton, has been out with a truck driver actually experiencing how bumpy it is.

A member interjected.

Gaelle BROAD: Her bruised head; that is right – just experiencing the uneven nature of our roads. If you have hit any of those potholes, you have probably experienced that absolute thud and that crunch. We have seen in the news reports that Victoria’s roads will continue to deteriorate despite so-called record funding. The newspapers talk about experts warning not enough work is being done by the Allan government to rehabilitate roads:

Data released in performance reports linked to the May budget have revealed that despite a record \$976 million in funding, a shockingly low amount of road repairs will be carried out compared to previous years across regional Victoria and outer Melbourne in the year ahead.

It goes on to analyse Victoria’s road maintenance targets, which show that in 2025–26, works in regional areas will dramatically reduce to 2.7 million square metres. This is down 13 per cent from the target of 3.1 million in 2024–25 and down from 9 million square metres of road that was being fixed and treated to protect against rain and potholes in regional Victoria in 2022–23. I know my colleague and Leader of the Nationals Danny O’Brien has pointed out that despite claiming it is spending record amounts on roads, Labor’s own budget papers show a shocking 93 per cent reduction next year in patching works and a 13 per cent reduction on road resealing and rehabilitation. So where is the money going? Last year alone there were approximately 15,000 reports of potholes – that is averaging over 120 defects daily. But yes, as I said before, if you have ever driven on these roads, you will know what I am talking about.

It is not just roads, it is our health system. There is a significant shortage of hospital beds, particularly in regional areas like Mildura and Wodonga, which leads to ambulance ramping. Mildura is now the worst hospital for emergency department waits, and my colleague Jade Benham –

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, Acting President, just on relevance, whilst the state tax bill deals with a number of taxation matters, I am not sure it deals with potholes or hospitals, so I would ask the member to come back to the bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I ask the member to come back to taxation and revenue measures, please.

Gaelle BROAD: I do believe that state taxation is important. As I was mentioning, it is raising revenue, and where that money is going is very important. But this bill does talk very much about property taxes. Recently I hosted a forum in Bendigo with Tim McCurdy MP, and we met with local real estate agents to discuss the deepening housing crisis in regional Victoria. As I mentioned before, there are 60 new or increased taxes – 30 of these target property – and Labor’s policies are pushing rental providers out and driving up the cost for tenants. I have received emails about these issues, and this particular bill does talk about the Land Tax Act. I received a letter from a gentleman in Huntly, and he says:

We are a couple in our mid 70’s on a part pension. Due to health reasons we retired from work 5 years ago.

He goes on to say:

In the last 3 years we have had land tax and “covid debt recovery charge” applied. First it was less than \$300. Last year it was increased to over \$1600 and this year the bill is over \$1700. We could not pay last years and are on a payment plan with the State Revenue Office.

He goes on to talk about:

Adding up Mansfield Council rates, Bendigo Council rates along with the new “Volunteer Services Levy” on both rates charges this year’s land tax and covid debt recovery charge is impossible to pay.

This is the pressure that people are under. I received another email from someone who was telling me about – well, this is one example of why investors are moving away from residential property. He talks about the costs that you find on a four-bedroom home in Strathfieldsaye. He says:

Rent was \$550 per week, has just been listed and relet at \$600 per week.

He lists the costs connected: council rates, over \$3200; land tax, over \$18,600 on that property; insurance, over \$1600; the agent's management fee, \$2300; the Coliban Water fee, over \$1000; mandatory electrical inspection, over \$160; general repairs, \$1164. The expenses are over \$28,200, and the rent for the 2024–25 financial year is \$28,600. That is just an example of the incredible burden that is being placed on people with property, and yet we see the introduction of the emergency services tax, another new tax. Again I ask: where is the money going? Because this particular tax is to pay for services that have previously been funded under the state budget. I received another email from a lady called Carolyn, and she talked about that emergency services tax. She said:

... it's not just farmers that Victorian taxes are effecting. Before this tax was on the table the new Victorian land tax effected me as a small property owner who struggled all my life to pay for my investment, for a good retirement. My land tax went from \$9000 to \$28,000 per annum, which I could not afford. I had owned and lived at the property for 30 years. I am actually glad, now that this tax has come in that I have sold.

And then she talks about the impact on other people and small investors in a similar boat.

We have seen people protesting against this tax. Certainly that has happened in Bendigo, it has happened on the steps of Parliament and I know on the weekend it happened in Ballarat. The councils have said very clearly they do not want to collect it. No-one can afford it, and the impact of the drought has just meant that this has been the most difficult time for people, particularly in regional areas that rely on the land.

The damage done by this government is extensive, and it will take years to fix. We need a government for the whole of the state, a government that is more equitable and more transparent and a government that cares about your money and where your money is going and how that money is being spent. We have seen in previous budgets under this Allan Labor government that only 13 per cent of new infrastructure spending goes to regional areas, yet we have 25 per cent of the population that have chosen to live in regional Victoria. Now, we are less than 70 weeks away from the next state election. We need a change of government and a fresh start.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:49): I rise to speak on behalf of the Victorian Greens on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025. The bill proposes a number of changes to a range of state taxes, the most substantive being the extension of the temporary off-the-plan stamp duty concession for another 12 months and some tightening of the eligibility for the generous land tax concessions offered to build-to-rent operators. Whatever we think of this bill, what we can probably all agree is that it represents yet another example of how timid Australian governments prefer to tinker around the edges of the crisis in our housing and taxation systems rather than stepping up to implement the systemic reform that is needed. Beyond all the government spin and media releases on housing, the cold hard numbers in the Victorian budget say that housing affordability is expected to get worse year on year – in fact it has to so stamp duty revenue can continue to prop up the budget.

The 2025–26 budget released just a couple of weeks ago states that Victorian dwellings prices are forecast to grow by an average of 5 per cent a year over the forwards. If we compare this with the budget's expected wages growth of 3.25 per cent over the same period, the Victorian government is anticipating that the already unaffordable housing dream of young Victorians is becoming even less affordable – by 1.75 per cent in real terms every year. Of course this forecast is probably optimistic in regard to a first home buyer's wages growth comparative to property prices. It is telling that the Victorian property industry is openly lobbying for an overall rise in apartment and townhouse prices of 15 per cent from current levels over and above forecast annual price rises, particularly with regard to those apartments in the so-called affordable price range. It is also telling that they are big supporters of the government's housing agenda.

Labor keep telling us that they are making changes that will make housing more affordable, even if this involves inverting the laws of economics by also making it more expensive. Victorians should not hold their breath for this housing miracle. The fact that it is getting harder and more expensive every year to buy or rent a home is not news to the thousands of Victorians attending opens every week, but

what may come as a surprise is that for many Victorians the government's announceables around making housing more affordable are actually making the problem worse – which leads to the proposed extension of the stamp duty concession for off-the-plan developments by 12 months in this bill.

The minister told us last year that this was a short-term targeted policy. In fact the minister forcibly argued against extending the scheme when we debated this proposal, so there are some questions to be asked about why this is again being extended. What 12 months ago was necessarily a short intervention due to the fact interest rates had not fallen is now a longer-term intervention because interest rates are falling. The accompanying media release could have had a quote from the minister saying, 'Just don't think too hard about it.' So while it is self-evident that this is no longer a short intervention, we now have evidence that it is not a targeted one either. While there may be some logic to trying to reduce stamp duty on the 8000-odd affordable apartments currently sitting empty, it makes no sense to provide tax breaks to the luxury end of the market where off-the-plan sales and construction rates have remained consistently strong and where buyers can actually afford to pay the tax. Yet this is exactly where the concessions are overwhelmingly going. Just google the words 'Luxury apartment for sale in Melbourne' and you will see developers spruiking hundreds of thousands of dollars in stamp duty savings on opulent riverside developments with entry-level prices starting at over a couple of million dollars.

As one somewhat incredulous real estate agent told the *Age* a few weeks ago when celebrating a client receiving a \$1.1 million stamp duty concession on a \$20 million purchase, 'Wealthy people are going to buy these properties anyway regardless of these handouts from taxpayers.' What is more egregious is that not only are these tax concessions just overwhelmingly benefiting the wealthy in dollar terms, but because stamp duty rates are set progressively the wealthy buying properties over \$2 million will also receive a higher rate of tax concession than those buying more modest properties. Why do the superwealthy, who do not need or ask for these concessions when buying multimillion-dollar properties, receive a greater benefit both real and in relative terms than those young Victorian families who still cannot afford to buy a modest new apartment?

This is a big beautiful housing bill where those buying apartments in excess of \$2 million will get the biggest benefit while those struggling with the cost of living will get a far lower trickle-down benefit. Suffice to say that this Labor government simply cannot afford the kind of largesse that gives a \$1.1 million tax credit to someone buying a \$20 million apartment for no reason, especially when you can look further into the budget to find that the waitlist for those seeking priority housing to escape family violence has blown out to over 17 months. There can be no greater example of just how badly this government has got its spending priorities wrong. The Greens therefore have amendments, which I will ask the clerks to kindly circulate now.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The government's rhetoric has claimed repeatedly that these tax concessions are a targeted measure to help first home buyers and young families struggling to afford housing. The reality is that this is a regressive trickle-down tax concession that overwhelmingly favours the wealthy when buying multimillion-dollar luxury apartments. Our amendments effectively seek to make these tax concessions match the government's rhetoric by making sure all concessions are tightly targeted towards getting Victorians into affordable homes. Unlike luxury developments, the current pricepoint for new affordable apartments does seem to be unaffordable for most people, meaning thousands of apartments are sitting empty while others never begin construction in the first place. The Greens amendment seeks to cap the off-the-plan stamp duty concession – extended by 12-months under this bill – to homes where the dutiable value is not more than \$1.6 million, or three times the current median value of new apartments, because that is what targeted housing affordability policy actually looks like. What is more, if passed, we would like to see the additional revenue generated from ending concessions on luxury properties to be hypothecated into building more priority public housing for those who most need it – for example, people escaping family violence – to bring the waitlist down from the current 17 months, which I think we would all agree is absolutely

unacceptable. Hypothecating income on luxury penthouses will likely deliver tens of millions of dollars more to these underfunded housing programs to protect families, who instead will be waiting over a year to escape danger.

The word ‘crisis’ is overused in politics, but we could all agree that this much is clear: there is no luxury housing crisis in Australia. Multimillion-dollar developments are being built and sold like hotcakes. Billionaires are managing to scrape by okay without taxpayer handouts, so the Victorian government handing out \$1.1 million tax sweeteners to this cohort when buying \$20 million penthouses can only be described as some kind of joke. However, there is an undisputed housing affordability crisis in this state, as there is a family violence crisis. Some might say, if we are not there yet, there is also a fiscal crisis. The Greens amendments are about being fiscally responsible by targeting tax concessions to where they will address the state’s genuine housing needs while providing the necessary revenue to invest in the appalling priority housing waiting lists.

We have further amendments regarding build-to-rent, or BTR, developments. BTR has a role to play in the housing mix, but the Greens are concerned that the state government is putting too many eggs and taxpayer dollars in this basket, particularly as BTR rents are generally much higher than the open-market equivalent. The land tax concessions for BTR operators under the Land Tax Act 2005 are overly generous – up to 50 per cent of the taxable value of the land – yet these operators are still charging weekly rents higher than landlords who do not receive land tax concessions, so something really does not add up here.

The Greens have also advocated to the Treasurer to remove the loophole allowing BTR developers to avoid paying the public open space levy to local governments, which goes towards balancing the increased housing density with new parks, greenery and open space in these localities, which really make them more livable places. This levy is really a win-win for the community, and BTR should have to pay an equivalent levy that is already paid by build-for-sale developers on subdivisions. I am pleased to advise that the Treasurer has indicated that the government is reviewing this loophole, and the Greens will continue to pressure this government to correct this oversight in this term of Parliament and deliver better outcomes for local residents.

BTR operators have justified the higher rents they charge by claiming that they offer longer leases and housing stability to tenants in return. This bill makes some small improvements to make sure that these leases, of at least three years, are being genuinely offered by providers in order for them to receive the land tax discount. But the Greens believe there should be a stronger legislative requirement to stop BTR operators from exploiting loopholes and to genuinely offer the kind of rental stability to tenants that they claim justifies their price premiums, because despite the sunny rhetoric in the brochure, there have been countless stories of BTR operators booting out tenants for no reason or – this is now being prohibited – pricing tenants out of their homes by excessively raising rents after 12 months.

One such operator in Fitzroy reportedly raised rents by up to 17 per cent after just one year. While three-year leases are positive, they will be of little value to a renter who has been told that their rent – already at a premium over the market rates – will increase by 17 per cent or more in the space of a year. I spoke earlier of how the government’s own figures show average wages rising by 3.25 per cent at best over the next year. So the reality is even with a three-year lease many BTR renters will be forced to leave after the first year if they receive an excessive rent increase. Therefore our amendments propose to require BTR operators to also cap annual rent increases at no more than 5 per cent per annum, alongside offering a three-year lease, to be eligible for the 50 per cent land tax discount. This will mean that BTR renters will have genuine long-term housing stability rather than facing the real prospect of being priced out of their apartments after just one year. BTR operators who are unwilling to offer such genuinely stable long-term housing for renters will still of course be able to raise prices beyond 5 per cent in a 12-month period; they just will not be able to claim the generous land tax concessions if they choose to do this.

In short, our amendments incentivise BTR operators to deliver the kinds of rentals that they advertise they will. Both sets of Greens amendments better target concessions to provide genuinely affordable homes for first home buyers and for renters, while ensuring badly needed tax revenue will continue to come from those who can afford to pay the full tax when buying or renting out properties. Our amendments clearly improve the operation of these taxes, so I commend them to the house and will have further to say during the committee stage of the bill.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:02): I am pleased to rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, a bill amending the Duties Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007 and the Taxation Administration Act 1997 for a range of purposes. I will go to some of those. It is a bill we strongly support that facilitates several tax concessions and exemptions for Victorians, tax concessions that will help more people buy their own home by extending the stamp duty concession for off-the-plan apartments and townhouses for another year, saving Victorians an average of \$25,000 on purchasing a new home; tax concessions which will help open up more long-term options for Victorians via the build-to-rent sector; and tax exemptions for victims of family and domestic violence who have been forced into leaving their principal place of residence due to that family violence. It is a bill that ensures our tax system continues to be fair, progressive and incentivised, working to improve the services and the lives of Victorians. Some of the measures in this bill are part of the suite of measures that we as a Labor government are committed to to get more Victorians into homes. It will, through some measures, increase the supply of new housing, attracting and providing incentives for housing to be built; it provides some security and stability to other cohorts; and it is part of the way that Labor is combating the housing crisis here in Victoria.

I want to spend a bit of the speech talking about the build-to-rent sector and about build-to-rent homes, which are becoming more and more an important and increasingly popular way of providing housing in Victoria. Melbourne is the build-to-rent capital of the nation. There are now more than 20 build-to-rent developments here in Victoria, the first completed just a couple of years ago, amounting to more than 6000 apartments provided under the scheme, with around 18,000 under construction or in planning approval. Clearly the changes that the state government made in the 2021 budget, I think, to create some incentives to facilitate more build-to-rent developments here in Victoria are working. The growth of the build-to-rent sector here in Victoria has been I think a really promising way of diversifying the housing mix that is available. In particular one of the things that I think is very importantly different about the build-to-rent sector compared to the traditional sector is the way we are seeing an increasing number of institutional landlords coming into the rental market here in Victoria, which changes the dynamic in the rental market from people who might own one, two, three or four residential rental properties. Someone who owns a large apartment block full of rental properties over a longer term has a very different relationship to the management of the rental stock – things like maintenance, things like ensuring quality in the construction and quality in the ongoing maintenance of those facilities. I think it is a really interesting development in the rental market here in Melbourne and one that I support.

The other reason for the interest in the area is I have had for the last few months a parliamentary intern from the University of Melbourne, under the parliamentary internships program, working with me in my office, and Tahlia has been doing a research paper on the build-to-rent sector here in Victoria, particularly in the Southern Metropolitan Region. Some of the comments in this speech have been informed by the work that Tahlia has done. One of the pieces of feedback we received in the course of the research we were doing is from a tenant of one of the build-to-rent developments, and they said:

It has allowed me to live in an area I previously could not afford to.

In the Southern Metropolitan Region more and more people are living in apartments in multi-unit developments. Seven of the 20 build-to-rent developments in Melbourne are in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

One of the important elements of the policy intent behind the tax concession changes that were introduced by the government a few years ago was the need to create more security in the rental market, and one of the conditions on the tax concession has been that tenants must be offered three-year leases. This bill strengthens and clarifies that requirement. In order to qualify for the tax concession, a lease of at least three years must be genuinely offered to tenants under the changes proposed by this bill rather than merely being available. A minimum three-year lease term ensures stability and security for tenants and helps protect against excessive annual rent increases, which have been a feature of the traditional rental market. Obviously the tenancies that are entered into in the build-to-rent sector – multiyear leases – are still regulated in the same way as all leases in the broader community, which requires under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 that rent increases and clauses to facilitate rent increases must be included in lease agreements of more than 12 months, the terms of which must specify that rent can go up once only once every 12 months. But under multiyear lease agreements the rent escalation clause, if you will, has to be set in advance, which would prevent the sort of unreasonable and excessive rent hikes that we see operating between lease agreements in the course of rental provision.

There was a very interesting paper produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics last month which examined the rental increases that were seen in longer term multiyear existing tenancies and compared them to rent increases that were occurring for new tenancies and between new lease agreements that people saw in the rental market. What is very, very clear from the work that the ABS published last month is that tenants in multiyear leases have lower annual rent increases than people who are switching between tenancies. The security that longer term tenancies provide does put positive downward pressure on rental increases, and that is there in ABS data. The tenants of build-to-rent developments can obviously choose to have leases shorter than three years, but what this bill importantly ensures is that in this scenario a joint declaration has to be signed by both the developer and the tenant testifying that a three-year lease was genuinely offered. It is important feedback.

As part of the research that my office was doing through the parliamentary internship in the last couple of months, we went out and did a small survey of some of the tenants in build-to-rent developments in the Southern Metropolitan Region to gain their feedback firsthand as to what they were experiencing. What was concerning was – and it was a very small sample that we got back – that less than 10 per cent of the tenants surveyed said that they had been offered a lease of at least three years, and most of them were on a lease of just one year. That has obviously raised some concerns for me. That is why I am very, very supportive of this bill that is going through the Parliament today, to make sure that the tax concessions that are being offered to facilitate the build-to-rent developments here in Victoria are actually and genuinely offering longer term leases, because there is some emerging evidence that it is not the case that they have been. The feedback that we had from this renters survey was that tenants want that stability, they want that longer term and they want the ability to know for certain what the rent increases that they were likely to experience were going to be over the course of their likely tenancy.

The other, really encouraging piece of feedback from the work that we have done with the residents and tenants in these build-to-rent developments is that overall the lived experience of the tenants in these developments is really positive. Of the tenants that responded to our survey who had previously rented in the traditional rental market, two-thirds said that their experience in a build-to-rent development was either somewhat or much better than the experience that they had had in prior tenancies in different parts of the private rental market. We think that build-to-rent developments are making a difference here in Melbourne. We think they are an important addition to the housing mix, and I think the changes that have been put forward in this bill by the government today will strengthen the regime of protections that are in place for tenants and ensure that the scheme is being used as it is intended and that the tax concessions are being used as they are intended – that is, to facilitate the development of tenancies that deliver security in the long term for tenants. That is really, really important.

The bill also makes some important changes to expand the stamp duty concessions for off-the-plan apartments and townhouses, a scheme that was announced in October last year, saving homebuyers an average of \$25,000 – it will now be extended by a further 12 months. This is a really welcome change. Victoria continues to build the highest number of homes in any state in Australia and continues to approve more homes for construction than any other state. Our measures are helping to reduce the cost of home ownership and increase the supply of new homes, and we are increasing the protections for Victorians who live in them. That is how the Victorian government, the Allan Labor government, is supporting Victorians with the goal of home ownership.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (16:13): I rise to speak in support of this bill today. It makes a range of updates across Victoria's tax system. While many of these amendments are technical and administrative in nature, there are also measures within this bill that speak to the core values that underpin our tax system, because taxation, as we all know, is not just about the dollars and the cents flowing into government coffers. It should be about much more than simply collecting revenue. It is fundamentally about fairness, it is about compassion and it is about ensuring that our systems and structures are responsive to the realities of Victorians, especially those facing the most difficult of circumstances. We must never lose sight of the fact that behind every tax return, every land title transfer and every financial document there are people, real people, who at times are navigating crisis, trauma and upheaval, and so our responsibility as politicians is to make sure that our laws reflect not only economic imperatives but also our collective humanity.

I want to highlight the new exemption for people impacted by family violence. While this change may appear small on paper, I have no doubt that its real-world impact will be significant. Property ownership, and more specifically housing security, is often one of the critical factors in determining whether a person experiencing family violence is able to safely exit an abusive relationship. The ability to retain or transfer property without the added financial burden of stamp duty or land tax can be the difference between rebuilding a safe, independent life and being forced back into harm's way. We know that family violence does not follow a script and that each and every case is different. We know the experiences of victim-survivors are varied and often complex, shaped by a web of emotional, financial, legal and cultural factors, so I am heartened to learn of the government's decision to include flexibility in the evidence requirements for people seeking an exemption. Victim-survivors should not be forced to relive their trauma through bureaucracy, and they should not have to repeatedly prove their suffering to access basic entitlements or protections. I remain hopeful, and I urge the government to ensure not only that the application process for this exemption is clear and straightforward but that it is also trauma informed. That means working with frontline services, listening to those with lived experience and building systems that prioritise safety, dignity and accessibility. No survivor should be retraumatised by the very process that is supposed to support them.

I also want to take a moment to commend the opposition for their contributions to this bill, particularly their amendment to introduce land tax exemptions for those affected by natural disasters. This is an important inclusion and one that I know will be welcomed by the people who live in my electorate of Northern Victoria. These are communities that have endured a devastating series of challenges in recent years. Right now many are battling the ongoing effects of drought, but their hardship did not begin with the dry spell. We saw it in 2022 when widespread flooding devastated the region, and before that it was the bushfires that impacted us. These are resilient communities. They do not ask for much, but what they do need and what they deserve is a tax system that recognises their hardship and responds with empathy and with support. When a family loses their home in a flood or their farm is decimated by fire, they should not face a wall of red tape when seeking temporary tax relief.

That brings me to a broader point, one that I believe this Parliament must seriously consider going forward: Victoria currently lacks clear and consistent hardship exemptions within its taxation laws. Although the State Revenue Office has the ability to grant hardship-related tax relief, the current guidelines are not clear. They are not simple or easy to navigate. Other states, such as New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT, have already taken this step. They have enshrined into law the

right to tax relief for individuals and families facing genuine exceptional hardship. It should not be easier to seek financial compassion from the Australian Taxation Office, a federal institution, than from our own state systems, but at present that is too often the case. We pride ourselves on being a progressive state, one that leads the way in human rights, social inclusion and community wellbeing, but our tax system must reflect those values in practical, tangible ways.

What I am calling for today is simple: let us create a legislative framework that embeds compassion into the heart of our tax laws. Let us ensure that when Victorians fall on hard times, be it through violence, through disaster or through unforeseen hardship, the tax system does not become another burden they must carry; instead, let it be part of the solution. The measures in this bill today may not grab headlines, but they matter to people deeply. They speak to how we treat one another, especially in moments of crisis. And that is the measure of any good government or of any good Parliament – not just how it manages budgets or balances books, but how it cares for people in their time of need. And so with that I commend the bill to the house.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:19): I rise today to speak to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, a piece of legislation that perfectly encapsulates this government's approach to policymaking. It has great rhetoric and inadequate delivery, and it is always reaching its hands into Victorians' pockets to drag out more money. I think it is interesting that this bill has been framed as practical relief, budget integrity and advancing gender equality and social justice. These are noble aspirations and ones that we on this side of the house have long championed. It was the opposition that repeatedly raised the issue of exempting women escaping family violence from land tax obligations. We identified this injustice, we advocated for these women and we demanded action. Yet when the government finally acts, after being dragged kicking and screaming to address this issue, they deliver a solution so flawed, so narrow and so bureaucratic that in large parts it fails the very women that it claims to help. Its implementation raises more doubts about its real effectiveness and it being yet another symbolic measure rather than an actual solution that can make real change. I absolutely think that it is well intentioned, but I think there are also some devastating aspects of this that would really impact the implementation.

We support helping victim-survivors of family violence – it is something that I am absolutely passionate about. There is hardly a week that goes by in this place where I do not stand up and speak about these types of issues. But supporting an idea and supporting a flawed execution are two different things entirely. This bill's family violence exemption contains three fundamental flaws that renders it inadequate for the women that need it most. The first one is that it is not retrospective. As our colleague James Newbury said in the other place in his contribution:

... as far as I am advised from the department, is not retrospective, so any of the victims who have been sent land tax bills because they have fled, up to when this bill is given royal assent, will not be helped.

If we think about that, women who have already received land tax bills are fleeing terrible situations. They have raised the issue too early, and because it happened too early, this legislation will not reach them. Regardless of the fact that they are the ones that this has been created for, in order to solve a problem, the solution will not fit their needs.

Second, victims are disqualified if they earn a single dollar from their former home. Another colleague of mine Cindy McLeish said that if you happen to rent it out, you cannot get a land tax exemption, and you will be paying rent elsewhere. I know of people in this circumstance. They have left. They were in a dangerous or difficult situation and they have had to move, but they do not want to get rid of the home. They might want to go back there when things are resolved, and now they are being sluggish with this tax.

Let me share a real example that demonstrates how inadequate this approach is. The member for Brighton once again raised a case of a woman in Bayside fleeing family violence who received a land tax bill despite the unsafe environment that she was forced to escape. She could not afford to leave her property empty while she rebuilt her life, so she leased it out temporarily to generate an income just to

get by. Under the government's rules she has earned an income from that property – her former home, which she was made to leave – and she is excluded entirely from this land tax exemption. This is not a woman that is gaming the system; she is merely trying to get by. She rented out her home not as a landlord pursuing profit but as a lifeline to financial stability, and for that the government has handed her a tax bill. We are essentially telling women and children fleeing abuse that they are either homeless and exempt or sheltered and penalised.

Last of all, the third point I want to talk about is while this government claims to advance social justice, it abandons other vulnerable Victorians entirely. I want to bring up something that the member for Euroa Annabelle Cleeland observed. She said:

I know in my community people are still out of their homes and receiving land tax bills after enduring the October 2022 floods. It is heartless.

Why does this government believe that women fleeing violence deserve a tax break, which is something we have long advocated for, but not families that have faced incredible devastation fleeing their homes for other areas? Both are victims of circumstances beyond their control, and both have been forced to leave their homes. I believe that both deserve our compassion and support. Given that the bill was almost actually adjourned and I snuck in with a contribution, I will end with that. While we welcome measures to support victim-survivors of family violence – indeed we initiated the calls for such measures – this legislation fails to deliver meaningful relief for women who need it most.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:25): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:26): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 to 7, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Enver Erdogan:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:27): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I know it is the most hotly anticipated bill being put forward in the entire Parliament this week. I know Minister Erdogan has worked tirelessly on this bill, with many painstaking and sleepless nights putting the final pieces on this bill for it to conclude here in this chamber. The bill purports to tidy up our regulatory landscape yet in truth finds another way, in classic Labor fashion, to dip into the pockets of ordinary Victorians. That is what I fear is before us today – another example of the Allan government's addiction to taxation: taxation dressed up as reform, taxation dressed up as modernisation, taxation slipped quietly into the pages of a bill that most of the public will never read. They will certainly feel it once it becomes law.

The government tells us that the bill streamlines processes, makes life easier for applicants, and removes archaic language. Those are admirable aims, but they are not the core of this particular bill. At the heart of the legislation it introduces so-called premium payments on monitoring licences and

public lottery licences. These premium payments are taxes in all but name. Clause 7 actually spells it out in quite plain English:

The premium payment ... is a tax.

Those are not just my words; it is not a partisan flourish but the government's own drafting. It is for this reason the Liberals and Nationals will seek to remove this clause from the bill, and if that is not successful, we will be opposing the bill in its entirety. I am happy to call for that amendment to be circulated.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Evan MULHOLLAND: A tax by any other name still takes hard-earned dollars out of local communities. Every hotel owner, every bowls club and every RSL across Victoria knows that when this Labor government imposes a new fee, levy or premium the buck stops with them, because they know – and bitter experience has taught them – that when a government hits \$194 billion of debt it will look for soft targets, and community venues become the softest target of all. We certainly know the government has a track record of targeting particularly RSLs, and we saw that through the very aggressive pursuit by this government through the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission of RSLs – many in the northern suburbs like the Glenroy RSL – forcing them to pay for licences that they could not actually use due to local government restrictions, and it was only after a local grassroots campaign I ran that the government was forced to backflip on those licences and create a mechanism for those licences to be surrendered. That was a good outcome, but what was not a good outcome was all the money that those RSL had to spend on lawyers and legal fees to fight the government and its attempts to aggressively starve them of any sort of cash flow.

Consider first the premium payment on monitoring licences: for decades Victoria has issued single monitoring licences for a fixed 15-year period. The current licence, granted in 2012 and due to expire in 2027, provided certainty to the incumbent, and equally importantly, to every venue required by law to use the monitoring service. In these kinds of regulatory environments certainty breeds investment, certainty supports competition and certainty lets accountants run their spreadsheets and bankers approve their loans. The bill tears that certainty to shreds. The minister and the minister alone will decide whether the next licence runs for one year or 20 – no guidance, no ceiling, no floor, just 'Trust me.' That is not regulatory clarity; that is what I would say is an invitation for regulatory confusion.

Business regards uncertainty like a virus. If an international firm is weighing up whether to bid for a licence, investing tens of millions of dollars into secure servers, data analytics, carded play technology and the skilled staff to run it, how can it justify that expenditure without knowing whether the contract horizon will be long enough to recoup the costs? A shorter horizon tilts the field towards the incumbent provider Intralot, which already owns the infrastructure and can outlast rivals. That is not how you foster innovation, that is how you discourage it here in Victoria.

The minister also gains the power to impose the premium payment up-front annually, in full or in instalments. Venue operators do not know whether they will be presented with one single eye-watering invoice or a drip feed that bleeds them month by month, but they do know that whatever the structure, the money must come from somewhere. Gaming revenue is fixed by regulation, so they cannot simply spin the pokies faster. What they can and inevitably will do is put an extra dollar on a meal or 50 cents on a pint or an extra \$5 on a family outing; that is what will inevitably happen. If the government swoops in with a premium payment of even \$2000 payable immediately, your local venue has a choice to make: do they jack up prices, lay off staff or just close their doors? That is the human face of this legislation – a face that is too often hidden behind Treasury spreadsheets, boffins and talking points. Proponents point to the harm minimisation benefits, and I support evidence-based measures to reduce problem gambling – precommitment technology, mandatory breaks in play and robust self-exclusion registers. But let us be honest, this bill is not about that at all. The mandatory precommitment regime was legislated this year. Cashless card trials are expected to begin later this year or in early 2026. The substance of this bill is tax. The harm minimisation fig leaf cannot obscure the revenue-raising trunk.

Government members will also highlight administrative tidying, eliminating gendered language, allowing EFT rather than cheques for winnings over \$1000 and streamlining licence transfers by removing the need for Governor in Council approval. These are sensible uncontroversial changes, and if they were the entire bill we could quite easily support this bill. I do not go to the pokies often, but if you are at the pokies it is a nice little threshold for you or one of your mates to crack the feature on More Chilli and get a cheque. It is a nice little threshold, but EFT will do for those who do enjoy the occasional flutter. I am not one who is a regular at the pokies; it is probably more of a once-a-year thing, if even that.

Unfortunately, while all of those things are fine, there is a poison pill in this bill which we cannot abide. Some will ask, 'Why impose a tax on gambling at all? Surely collecting more from an activity that can cause social harm is defensible.' Fair question. My answer is that taxation must still be transparent, proportionate and predictable, and at present the burden of these premiums will fall not on big business but on community venues and corner newsagents that are already paying some of the highest gaming taxes in the nation. To me, that is just not fair at all. Process matters too. This bill fixes no schedule of charges. It hands that power entirely to the minister. Parliament is asked to sign a blank cheque. Once the ink is dry, the executive may fill in whatever numbers it likes. In a state rightly criticised for project blowouts – you are up to \$48 billion, by the way, over the life of this government – and secret side deals and retrospective fee hikes, why would any prudent business trust such discretion?

The Treasurer declared quite proudly in her budget speech that there would be no new taxes this financial year. Yet here we are debating another Labor tax, and again it is written in the bill. The premium payment is a tax. We heard in budget week that there are no new taxes, and we are here the following sitting week debating a new tax. This Labor government cannot help itself when it comes to taxes. Victorians are right to be very wary of Labor's tricky word games. A tax called a 'premium' is still money taken; the government should tell the truth when it comes to that. The broader economic context really matters in this situation, because you begin to understand why the government would be interested in sneakily inserting new taxes into quite reasonable omnibus bills. That context is that net debt is expected to approach \$194 billion within four years. Servicing that debt will soon eclipse the entire annual budget for the Department of Education. When I talk about servicing that debt – \$194 billion of debt, over \$25 million a day and over a million dollars an hour – that is not to pay down the debt; that is just to service the debt. The paying of the interest on the debt is going to eclipse what we spend on the entire Department of Education. That is why budget management is so important. It is so important because this government cannot even fund things like opening the Craigieburn community hospital.

At the Northern Hospital they are stitching up data to make their figures look better. The government has to tax our fire services and our farmers because it has run out of money. When the government wastes money – it has \$48 billion of project blowouts – somebody has to pay for that, and it is ordinary Victorians that pay the price because this government cannot manage money. The spending just to service the interest on their massive debt again is eclipsing the whole spend for the Department of Education – what we spend on our kids' schools. It is any wonder our public schools are falling over with ill repair, because this government cannot manage money and is looking for every way to tax people so it can plug its massive black hole that is needed to service this massive \$194 billion of government debt.

Every charge is rationalised as necessary to protect frontline services, yet the cumulative effect strangles economic vibrancy. Small businesses hesitate to expand, international investors steer clear and regional towns watch young families drift interstate. The government insist the market can bear it, and I caution them: markets bear weight until suddenly they cannot. New Zealand's hike in the point-of-consumption tax saw several wagering firms exit, taking jobs and sponsorship dollars. The United Kingdom's aggressive clampdown on fixed-odds betting terminals decimated high street

bookmakers, with thousands of redundancies. Policy devised in a Treasury boardroom can devastate livelihoods on the ground.

Transparency is another casualty. In 2011 the Liberals and Nationals government conducted an open tender for a monitoring licence with clear criteria, published guidelines and independent probity oversight. Stakeholders may not have loved every outcome, but they could not fault the process. Under this bill the tender may proceed without a defined term, without disclosure of the premium framework and with the minister empowered to vary conditions at will. That is regulatory quicksand. When we speak about how important integrity is – in the Parliament, in government, in the public service and in ministerial offices – one would think that not having clear criteria, published guidelines or independent probity oversights when the minister is deciding single-handedly if a tender may proceed, particularly when it has to do with gaming, is very important and something that all members of this Parliament should note. Crossbench colleagues should note a subtle clause: only one licence extension is permitted before a fresh tender must occur. Coupled with unlimited ministerial discretion on the premium, this lets the government extract a windfall from the incumbent at extension time, secure in the knowledge that if negotiations collapse, a new tender can be announced with another up-front payment. It is hostage and ransom legislation, and that is wrong.

The shadow minister, Tim McCurdy in the other place, asked whether a regulatory impact statement would be tabled. All he got was blank looks – no surprise. He asked what consultation occurred with the volunteer-run clubs and was told there had been ‘targeted engagement’. In government parlance, targeted engagement means a phone call to a peak body two days before cabinet signs off. The people who cook the meals, slice the lemons and run the Thursday meat tray raffle – well, they were never in the room.

Let me be clear: opposing this bill is not a defence of poker machines. One can believe, as I do, that machines should be tightly controlled and venues must meet responsible service obligations while also believing that tax policy should be honest and proportionate, and the bill fails that test. I have been clear in my time in this place about my concerns about the social harm caused by poker machines, particularly in my electorate and particularly in our multicultural communities and vulnerable communities. There is a constructive path that would allow us to support this bill, which would be to strip out the premium provisions. We are hoping that our amendment will be supported, and then we would be in a position to support this bill. I suspect it will not, because this government has run out of money and it is ordinary Victorians that are paying the price.

We are going to hear from those opposite about their commitment to gambling harm prevention. I would remind those opposite to perhaps look up *Hansard* from my contribution a few weeks ago, where I pointed out it was the Joan Kirner Labor government that introduced the wicked scourge of poker machines into Victoria, another government that had run out of money. When they talk about the social good they are doing on this front, it is important always to give them a history lesson, and I remind them to stroll across to the parliamentary library and do the research for themselves – that a Labor government was the government that introduced the scourge of poker machines into Victoria. We should always remember that fact.

What was the eternal Kevin Rudd quote about the beating heart and soul of the New South Wales Labor right? It could also apply to Victoria: ‘casino land’. It has got some element of truth to it. It does have some element of truth to it when you look at who is doing the lobbying and when you remember that it was a Labor government who started this scourge in Victoria. If the government refuses our amendment, we must vote no. We will do so not out of reflex but out of a principled defence of small businesses, volunteers and patrons being used as collateral in a budgetary shell game.

It bears remembering that this Parliament has watched a parade of efficiency bills in recent years – the road usage charge, the fire services property levy, the vacant residential land tax expansions – each modest on paper, each now baking hundreds of millions into annual revenue forecasts. This normalisation of the perpetual tax grab erodes public trust. We should be reversing this trend, not

entrenching it. Moreover, the gaming industry already contributes over \$2 billion a year to state coffers, far more per capita than comparable jurisdictions. That revenue funds hospitals, schools, police stations – nobody disputes its importance. But good governance demands a balance between collection and sustainability. Push the lever too hard and the machine breaks, venues close, employment falls, black market play fills the void and harm increases. We meddle with that equilibrium at our state's peril.

I want to talk about the mandatory precommitment by 2028. The deadline is ambitious. Venues need clarity on technology, privacy safeguards and capital assistance, yet the government has been silent, occupying departmental resources in drafting the premium payment framework instead. Likewise, the promised statewide education campaign on gambling risks has stalled even as prime-time television is saturated with betting ads. If ministers were sincere about minimising harm, they might focus on those fronts rather than taxing regional pubs. Perhaps those that will follow from the Labor backbench when talking about their harm minimisation efforts could tap the minister on the shoulder and ask when the TV ads are coming or when the other important harm prevention measures are going to be introduced. This bill is not about modernising the statute book or protecting vulnerable gamblers, it is about revenue. It is about imposing new taxes on entities that can really least afford them. This sweeping power and a minister without adequate scrutiny inject damaging uncertainty into an industry that, like it or not, underpins thousands of Victorian jobs. We will seek to remove clause 7 from the bill, and we will be voting against the bill if not successful.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (16:52): I rise today to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, in support of it. I will be speaking for a far shorter time than Mr Mulholland opposite, who took a very long time to say very, very little. I did think I was going to be standing up to say that in all that time talking about gambling he did not even find time to talk about the hundreds of thousands of Victorians that have been historically affected by gambling harm, whether that is the impact on their financial wellbeing or otherwise. We know that a percentage of Victorians are significantly impacted by gambling financially, whether it is mental health or relationship issues, and there is the flowthrough of that on people's jobs. When problem gambling strikes people, their entire lives can be impacted and indeed their families, and we can get to a situation of loss of life, which I have experienced personally, and it is incredibly tragic.

Although Mr Mulholland talked for 25 minutes, in typical conservative fashion, where they do not see such a thing as society, they do not see community in their conservative university clubs when they are there worshipping Reagan and Thatcher, there was no development of understanding or care for society, for community, for families and what things mean at the grassroots of Victoria. To hear them threatening to vote against a bill with premiums to be invested into the Hospitals and Charities Fund really brings you back to the point of the noalition. At every single point they will say, 'No, no, no.' You do not see in their contributions ideas or policies – policies that bring some sort of plan for this state, some sort of positive pathway that Victorians can rally around, because we know they do not believe in producing anything. They just believe in, as I said, saying no to things and ripping things to shreds. I, on the other hand, am proud to be part of a government that brings policies to the Victorian people, brings plans to the Victorian people and brings legislation like this to the Victorian people. I will come to the specifics of the bill shortly.

The bill follows on from work the government is doing in this space which I think is critically important: slowing down spin rates by 40 per cent on electronic gaming machines, EGMs, from 2.14 seconds to 3 seconds; reducing load-up limits from \$1000 down to \$100; having closure periods from 4 am to 10 am to ensure that people are not able to go to staggered intervals of gaming venues and continue to gamble; and having precommitment systems with trials rolling out. The work that has been done by this government to minimise harm is work that I am proud of and work that will make a substantial difference to the lives of Victorians.

This bill will strengthen the regulation of gambling in Victoria and ensure the government can extract value from major gambling licences. This bill modernises Victoria's gambling licensing framework,

improves integrity safeguards and supports reasonable gambling initiatives. Of course for those opposite, the word ‘reasonable’ does not mean much, hence why we have seen them bring an amendment. These reforms ensure that Victoria’s licensing processes remain robust, transparent and responsive to new technology and community expectations. The Allan Labor government continues to lead the nation on gambling reform, as I have said, modernising licensing frameworks and delivering harm minimisation across the system.

The bill updates the frameworks for issuing the monitoring and public lottery licences, which are due to expire in 2027 and 2028 respectively. The minister will have more flexibility to set the term of these licences, aligning them with other major gambling licences and helping to secure long-term value for Victorians. Another key point that is lost on those opposite, that is lost on the National–Liberal coalition, is the word ‘value’, because they see value in nothing. I am proud to be part of a government that looks for that value and looks to deliver value for Victorians. This change gives the government greater flexibility to deliver better economic outcomes and modernise the way major gambling licences are awarded. The government will be able to require a premium payment for the monitoring licence and public lottery licence, ensuring licence-holders contribute fairly to the public good. ‘Fairly’ – there is another word you do not hear the Liberals use too often. Premiums will be paid into the Hospitals and Charities Fund, as I said before, supporting health and community outcomes.

The bill gives the minister stronger tools to manage monitoring licence integrity, including clearer powers to require information sharing and responsible gambling standards as a condition of licence. The bill also ensures the monitoring licensee can provide responsible gambling and compliance systems, including tools to prevent money laundering and enable precommitment. These systems will help reduce gambling harm and support better oversight of electronic gaming machine operations in clubs and hotels.

I have talked through the work that the Allan Labor government is doing to minimise harm to Victorians. I think the fact that this bill is looking to deliver value, benefits and outcomes for Victorians is to be commended. But of course to be condemned are the voices and the words – they do not generally take actions; it is normally just hollow words – of the National–Liberal conservative opposition. Acting President, I thank you for the time to be able to make the contribution. I support the bill, and I will leave my words there.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (16:59): I rise today to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This legislation proposes a number of changes to Victoria’s framework for gambling licensing. The bill amends both the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 to provide additional powers to the minister in how the minister awards licences for both gaming machine monitoring and the public lottery and additional issues. In Victoria the gambling monitoring licence is the right to operate and maintain the electronic monitoring system that oversees all electronic gaming machines – EGMs, or poker machines – in venues other than the casino. This system tracks all activity across all EGMs in pubs and clubs; ensures compliance with gaming laws and tax obligations; detects suspicious behaviour, including potential fraud or tampering; and supports harm reduction tools, such as precommitment systems. The monitoring licence is exclusive, meaning only one provider is authorised to monitor all pokies in pubs and clubs across Victoria, and the Victorian Gaming and Casino Control Commission, the VGCCC, regulates the licence. The current monitoring licence expires in 2027.

Importantly for the Greens, and contributing to our decision to support this bill today, is that the bill makes amendments to be able to direct the monitoring licensee to provide precommitment systems. By requiring players to use a registered card to access poker machines, we can significantly reduce gambling harm as well as prevent money laundering and other illicit activities, which is a policy outcome supported by the Greens. We know that mandatory carded precommitment systems are already in place at Crown, so the introduction of a mandatory system across all other venues in the state will enable people to set their own limits on using poker machines. We understand that this bill does not achieve that in itself. The bill we passed last sitting week gave the minister the powers to do

that, and I sincerely hope that the minister and his team can crack on now and get that implemented. This bill is one of the parts of the scaffold needed to implement and then manage an effective statewide carded play system.

Putting the gambling harm suffered by Victorians in context, each year approximately 330,000 people in our state experience gambling-related harm, leading to financial distress; broken relationships; family violence; mental health issues, including suicides; business foreclosures; and more. The economic cost to our state is estimated at \$7 billion annually, although I do note we are awaiting the release of the research report that provides more up-to-date figures. These figures are not just statistics; they represent real people – our friends, family members and neighbours – whose lives are adversely affected by gambling addiction. Another positive element that this bill contains is the ability to direct the monitoring licensee to provide other regulatory compliance systems and mechanisms, such as anti-money laundering alert systems, to assist venue operators to comply with their regulatory obligations. The bill includes amendments to enable the continued operation of precommitment at the casino in periods of downtime, where the casino systems are unable to communicate with the statewide precommitment system.

The bill provides powers to the minister to enable the licence term to be specified in the licence, rather than the current fixed term of 15 years, which I have questions about for the minister during the committee stage. During a briefing from the minister's office the rationale provided was that this was necessary to conduct commercial-in-confidence negotiations that required this shift. Given that the legislation will no longer set the term of the licence, we urge the minister to keep flexibility in mind, given the government's commitment to implementing the mandatory carded play system across the state, and I particularly urge the minister to keep community interests at the forefront, not industry interests. This is relevant, noting the rapidly decreasing social licence of the gambling industry and the ongoing levels of devastation from gambling harm.

Victoria's current public lottery licence expires in 2028. This bill also enables the minister to issue a longer term extension of this licence, and as an anti-money laundering measure we support the amendments that will ensure payment by electronic funds transfers is always a permitted alternative to payment by cheque. As an additional harm reduction measure, I note that the bill reduces barriers to voluntary exclusion at Crown by ensuring that the Melbourne casino operator is required to issue an exclusion order on request by a person. This is done by removing unnecessary paperwork that exists currently requiring that a voluntary exclusion application needs to be signed by a person who is authorised to witness a statutory declaration.

Lastly, I note that the bill removes gender references from both the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991, which is welcome to ensure terms in our legislation are more gender neutral.

In summary, the Greens are supporting this bill as it does progress a necessary framework to be in place rolling out mandatory carded play systems statewide, which is a longstanding and key Greens policy objective. However, while we acknowledge the likely passage of this bill, we must express concern over the postponement of the trial of mandatory precommitment and the carded play system initially scheduled for mid-2025. Delaying the implementation of these reforms prolongs gambling harm that is inflicted across our communities. I will also make the observation that this bill does seem to continue a trend of powers being transferred from legislation, and therefore from parliamentary oversight, to ministerial powers by regulations or directions. We urge the minister to prioritise public health over industry interests. The delay in implementing the carded play trial does raise questions to me and to concerned individuals in the community about the continued influence of the gambling lobby and the government's dedication to protecting that gambling lobby's interests rather than protecting its citizens. We hope that the passage of this bill today takes us a step closer to having a mandatory precommitment and carded play system in place, which is the framework to reduce gambling harm in Victoria.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:06): I rise to speak on this Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill seeks to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 in relation to the monitoring licence and the public lotteries licence and generally to improve the operations of that act, and it seeks to amend the Casino Control Act 1991. I must say this is just another new big Labor tax on Victorians at a time when everyone is taxed to the hilt and can least afford it. We have over 60 new or increased taxes since the Andrews – now Allan – Labor government came into power a decade ago, and this bill helps facilitate yet another new tax to prop up their failing budget bottom line. At this stage, I will use some words from a well-known Australian, a successful businessman and entrepreneur: ‘If you’re going to create a new law, repeal an old one.’ I say to this government: if you are going to create a new tax, repeal an old tax. Those are words from the late Kerry Packer.

The Liberals and the Nationals oppose this bill for a few reasons: because we do not think another new tax is justified under the guise of tightening regulation in relation to the gambling sector, and because we believe in and are supportive of our community clubs and venues. I have listened to my community clubs in my electorate and have engaged broadly with these matters. Where I hear resounding consensus is that these changes lack detail and the cost of the changes to the monitoring licence will be passed onto venue holders, resulting in increased fees for monitoring and compliance. This is due to the introduction of the premium payment. This is something I will outline further in my contribution.

We oppose this bill because we believe in less government regulation and reducing red tape and costs, especially for our local venues, who are taxed enough as it is. We on this side certainly acknowledge and recognise the significance of the 2021 Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, led by the esteemed commissioner Ray Finkelstein, and its findings of the casino being unsuitable to hold a Victorian casino licence, citing, amongst other things, breaches of legal and moral obligations, including money laundering and criminal associations. We also fully appreciate the need to address gambling harm and to implement stricter provisions to prevent harm to those in our communities who are vulnerable to gambling addiction. Crown Casino was given two years to clean up their act following these adverse findings, by way of reforming the operations under strict independent oversight, under special management who would oversee all aspects of business and monitor their progress. This work has been ongoing, and I want to acknowledge the initial measures to make sure this process is working.

In relation to this bill, it seeks to make a variety of alterations to the monitoring licence which would come into effect after royal assent. Amongst the changes is the removal of the 15-year term for a licence to one that is specified by the minister of the day in the licence. Effectively, what this means in real terms is the minister can decide how long he or she would like to issue the monitoring licence for before seeking interested parties. This limits competition and could result in a licence of any length of time.

The bill also allows for the minister to require the monitoring licensee to pay a fee of one or more amounts for consideration of the licence. The minister sets the premium and may decide whether it is taken up-front, before the licence term commences, or as an ongoing annual payment during the term of the licence. This fee also extends to the renewal of such a licence, and it is clearly a new tax.

The introduction of the premium payment I mentioned earlier for the monitoring licence has been of particular concern on this side and has repeatedly popped up in my discussions with clubs, venues and other stakeholders. They are concerned about the potential flow-on costs to venues and clubs, which will be legally bound to pay for monitoring services. We do not believe this is fair or equitable as it will place prohibitive red tape and additional costs onto our community clubs and venues. The costs associated with the premium will be passed on by the monitoring company to the venues, resulting in substantial impacts on venues’ operating expenses, and will have a disproportionate impact on our rural and regional towns – in areas already doing it tough. This is just another blatant tax grab by the Labor government, doing anything and everything in their power to prop up their troubled budget.

There is also uncertainty around the term of the licence or the premium payment. Industry wants assurances on both so that they can operate. There is also concern that this will not be a market-driven process, as the government wants us to believe. There is no guarantee that this will be the case, nor will they put a figure on the licence term. We on this side support the market and know that industry-led processes achieve optimal outcomes for the community. These issues with the bill need to be rectified and clarified by the government.

One positive thing I would like to mention in relation to this bill that came to our attention when we spoke to stakeholders and venues – we do not just criticise bills, we actually acknowledge what is good – is that the phasing out of cheques is largely welcomed and will be positively received by venues. This is a timely initiative as many businesses and organisations are moving away from the use of cheques, streamlining processes and making things easier for staff. So I acknowledge that this is a positive in the bill.

The government needs to tighten up this bill so there is clarity around the change in the duration of licences. This government cannot continue extracting more revenue from recurring premium payments or limiting bidders when licences are up for renewal. This is uncompetitive and will weaken the tender process.

Like my colleagues, I have been speaking directly to local clubs and venues in my electorate, who I know are concerned about several issues with this bill. Some are the same issues that have been mentioned previously, but specifically they are concerned about the substantial impact on their operational costs from the introduction of a premium payment for the monitoring licence. They are concerned about the potential flow-on costs associated with this premium payment. I know my colleagues who represent our regional communities are particularly concerned about the impact these new provisions will have on some of the smaller venues in their home towns. These venues are the heart and soul of many small towns, and we do not want to make their lives even harder with this bill. I am personally concerned about the uncertainty about the term of the licence, the premium payment and the uncertainty for the industry.

The opposition opposes the bill in its current form. I implore the chamber and those opposite to consider the amendment that will be put forward by my colleague Mr Evan Mulholland. We were hopeful that those on the government benches would do some more work to make it more acceptable and that the uncertainty for industry would be taken into account. I was also hopeful that some of the measures lacking in detail would be addressed and ironed out. The costs of these changes and the flow-on costs to venue owners are quite unacceptable, and the increase in costs for monitoring and compliance I cannot support. Uncertainty around the duration of licences also is a serious concern, and the way the government can extract further revenue from recurring premium payments is an example of a government desperate to keep their hand in the pockets of venues to prop up their budget. On this side, with the state of the bill in its current form, we will not be supporting it.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:16): I would also like to briefly say a few words on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill does a few things. I will start with some of the things that I do not have a problem with. Changes to the licensing terms: rather than being fixed 15-year terms, they can be specified in the licence now – I do not necessarily have a problem with that. It also makes it easier to transfer licences and expands the powers for the minister to determine an application and the circumstances around licence transfers – I do not have a problem with that. Also, it does something around allowing for direct EFT payments over \$1000. Previously, any of these sorts of payments had to be made by cheque. I note that lots of banks are actually phasing out cheques, so I think this not only is a good thing but also will soon be a necessary thing.

On to the things that I do not like: a few weeks ago we debated a bill sort of linked to this around carded play, which I opposed. Many of the things in this are related to that. But the number one thing that I really do not like about this bill – and it has been noted by others in the chamber – is this new premium payment, which effectively is a new gambling tax, a new tax on operators. As I stated last

time we spoke about gambling in this place, everyone stands up here and talks about the harms that gambling causes and how gambling addiction causes many problems in Victoria – that is true; it does – but the number one organisation that is addicted to gambling is the government itself. Effectively running the machinery of government off the misery that is created is wrong, in my view.

I will not be supporting the bill if it has got this tax in it – effectively a new tax, and this is a big problem – which is unfortunate, because there are some other things in the bill which I think are sensible. But nevertheless I have taken a promise – in fact every Libertarian that has ever gotten elected in Australia has taken this promise – to never support an increase in taxes. This is an increase in taxes; therefore, I will not be supporting it.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:18): I am pleased to rise and speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, another piece of legislation in a series of bills that have been brought before the Parliament to deal with gambling-related issues. I think it is very clear from the legislative agenda this Parliament has had so far that the Allan Labor government is leading the nation on reforms to minimise harm from gambling, and this bill builds on the measures we have already delivered.

We have the strongest gambling regulator in the nation, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, with enhanced enforcement powers. We have got mandatory carded play for pokies at the casino so that players can manage and track their spending. We have got mandatory closure periods now: all hotels and clubs must close their gaming areas between 4 am and 10 am to reduce extended gambling sessions. We have obviously passed legislation recently to further reduce gambling harm and money laundering, including account-based play across poker machines in Victoria; implementing load-up limits on the pokies here in Victoria to limit the amount that individuals can put into the machines; and making it mandatory for all new machines to spin at a minimum rate of three seconds per game, slowing the pace of the game down and limiting the amounts that can be lost. They are real measures that this government has put into place to reduce harm from gaming and particularly harm from poker machines.

This further bill does a number of additional things, including updating the framework for the future of the monitoring licence and public lottery licences, which are due to expire in the next couple of years, and makes some other changes, including to deliver better public value, requiring a new premium payment to be made. Very briefly, I know we talk a lot about the really serious issue that problem gambling is in our community. I commend the minister, who is in the chamber, for the way he is thinking about it.

We do have a lottery system in this state, and part of the important changes that are being made in this bill is to give some greater flexibility for the minister in terms of setting these licences and securing better value for the Victorian taxpayer. I think that is really important. The lotto is a feature of our community; it is a feature of our lives, and I just want to reflect on that. For many it is a weekly ritual that is controllable, that does not do enormous harm. It may not bring enormous winnings all the time. Certainly my experience was of watching the lotto with both Mum and my grandma on a Saturday night just to check, to see what numbers had come in. Some members of the family used to run the same numbers every single week in the hope that they would come up. They did not often, but seeing that ritual play out in the households of many Victorians I think brings many in the community a little bit of joy and a little bit of something extra in their day-to-day lives.

I think that through having a system around that that both puts in place necessary protections and delivers the kind of broader value to Victorian taxpayers it is something that we are capable of effectively regulating. I think this bill does make those important additional changes. It is not something that I think we need to demonise or talk down. A lot of people enjoy playing the lotto, and I think that is a good thing for them if it brings them some joy and is something that they can manage.

What this government has demonstrated is our absolute commitment to making sure that harm is reduced from problem gambling. Particularly when it comes to things like the way that our lottery system operates, what the minister is doing is trying to deliver back to the Victorian taxpayer the absolute best value that we can from these features of our community. I wholeheartedly support the bill.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (17:23): I take this opportunity to thank all members who have contributed to the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I appreciate the considered contributions made in this chamber, and I want to acknowledge that there are a range of views on this issue. I thank Mr Batchelor as well for a good summary of the goals of our government in terms of minimising harm but also getting value from a public asset that can be reinvested in the Victorian people.

This bill is about ensuring that Victoria's gambling laws are modern, consistent and capable of delivering public value over the long term. It creates a stronger, clearer framework for how major gambling licences are issued, supporting greater transparency, flexibility and integrity and securing public value for public assets. Importantly, it strengthens the government's ability to embed harm minimisation directly into licence conditions, giving us the tools to respond to emerging risks, improve regulatory oversight and protect the community. These reforms will also support the government's landmark account-based play reforms. More broadly, these changes complement the government's nation-leading reforms already underway, from carded play at the casino to statewide mandatory shutdown hours and significant cuts to pokie load-up limits.

I want to acknowledge the constructive feedback from members across the chamber, and I thank all of those that have engaged with me and my office in good faith. These reforms are about building a framework that can respond to the future. That means long-term public value, stronger protections and a fairer, safe and sustainable system for Victorians. I commend the bill to the house.

Council divided on motion:

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

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

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (17:32)

Katherine COPSEY: I will ask all my questions at clause 1. Minister, in relation to the extension of time that this bill affords you discretion in relation to for both the monitoring licence and the lottery licence, why are you seeking this flexibility and why are you not continuing with the existing 15 years or 10 years respectively that exist in legislation?

Enver ERDOGAN: I thank Ms Copsey for her question and interest in this matter. I think it is a really good question, because this is the first time we are removing that limit in particular, for example, for lotteries. I think what we are trying to achieve is also – as I said in my summing-up speech – about capturing the best value for this public asset. So rather than locking in arbitrary limits, we believe

decisions like licence length are best made on a case-by-case basis informed by expert advice, market interests and what delivers the greatest benefit for Victorians. It is really providing that flexibility to respond to where the market is at.

Katherine COPSEY: In relation to that, will the community interest in terms of gambling harm reduction and the availability of technology and, for example, practices in other states be a factor that could also be taken into consideration in determining the desirable length of licences, so we do not have practices locked out from being included in the monitoring licence that could lead to gambling harm reduction?

Enver ERDOGAN: In the drafting of this legislation I did look at what other jurisdictions have, and public lotteries was a good example because they have different term limits in other jurisdictions – much longer than ours. One of the purposes was to give us the flexibility to have something more in line with what they have in other jurisdictions, but I think there are a range of factors in issuing these licences. I guess we are talking about in today's bill, in particular, two different types. For the monitoring licence I will be looking at a number of factors such as harm minimisation. I think that is key to the monitoring licence goal – and community value but also service quality to make sure that the monitoring licence is operational as much as possible and at all times ideally. Also, one of the issues I have realised, and that the opposition have raised, is the cost impacts on venues. These are some of the factors for the monitoring licence. I think for the lotto licence, in terms of the timeframe, it is about flexibility but also looking at what other jurisdictions have done in the past to extract the best value.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, moving on to the provision in relation to what information can be published in relation to lottery licensing arrangements – this is at clause 35 of the bill. Clause 35 allows the minister of the day to determine whether information can be excluded from being published. What is driving this? The effect of this could be to decrease transparency around the lotto licensing arrangements. Why is this power being sought?

Enver ERDOGAN: The goal is not to limit oversight in this process. I think we want to secure a fair and transparent outcome for the community, and that is why we are trying to extract the best value in terms of the premium. The process is subject to strong probity and public accountability. There is that avenue in terms of the probity that we attach to these processes, but obviously in any negotiation that the government enters into – but more so in terms of these types of contracts – there is an element of confidentiality and commercial complexity attached to them. There is that balance between the robust probity matters but also there are issues of commercial sensitivity at play that may not necessarily be in the best interest to be publicly available.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, would you be prepared to undertake in your capacity in exercising these powers to publish as much information as is practically possible?

Enver ERDOGAN: In short, yes. I think we should provide as much information as we can.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, moving to the disciplinary powers under clause 42, I just wondered if you could clarify for me how these work and how we can have confidence that the recommendations of the commission, if it makes a report under section 5.3.22 – or how the public can have confidence – that the minister of the day is taking them seriously and acting in accordance with the commission's recommendations. That is what I am seeking to understand around how these powers operate. That clause states that the commission can make a report, and that acting on that report the minister can amend, suspend or cancel the licence, or if you consider that disciplinary action is not warranted, can remit the matter to the commission with a request that the commission consider whether disciplinary action should be taken against the licensee. I just wanted to understand whether those reports that are made by the commission are public reports.

Enver ERDOGAN: I might just seek some clarity.

The answer to that, Ms Copsey, is no.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, if that is the case, then how is the public to know whether the minister of the day is acting in accordance with or rejecting the recommendations of the commission when it comes to disciplinary action?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think it is important to understand that in the first instance there is a strong independent regulator in the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. The VGCCC, as it exists with some of the existing operators in the gaming and gambling space, does already have powers to issue fines and disciplinary action. In terms of matters that would be, I guess, escalated to the minister of the day, there would be, at that level, a large amount of commercial sensitivity around those documents and around that decision-making. It would be difficult to be able to release them in that nature.

Katherine COPSEY: Minister, I think you can understand the thrust of my questioning here. If there is not transparency around whether the minister is accepting or, conversely, is not acting in accordance with the commission's recommendations around disciplinary action, then how is the public to have confidence in the disciplinary mechanism that is outlined in this portion of the bill?

Enver ERDOGAN: The regulator would obviously provide an annual report into its investigations. But you are asking about the content of the advice to the minister; that would be protected by executive privilege.

Katherine COPSEY: Okay. I think I am understanding now. There would be a section of the report that would indicate, for example, the numbers of reports the VGCCC had issued and then the outcomes of those as well.

Enver ERDOGAN: But not the advice to the minister.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. That clarifies things for me.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I will ask all my questions on clause 1. Has the government undertaken or completed modelling or taken an estimation of the premium payment on the monitoring licence?

Enver ERDOGAN: Mr Mulholland, the government is committed to reducing gambling harm and ensuring that licensing decisions support long-term community wellbeing. Social impact is a key consideration of the design of any licensing framework, and policy development is informed by advice. In terms of the modelling that you are asking about, I think it is key that I do state that we will take a fair and balanced approach to awarding the next monitoring licence. Premium bids will be assessed alongside the overall value and service offering proposed by each applicant to ensure the best outcome for the state and the community. Based on the available evidence, we do not expect a material change for venues in terms of the price. I understand from your contribution during the debate that your concern was from the perspective of increasing costs to venues and therefore to the broader public who attend the venues, especially community clubs. But I do want to clarify that as well. I think this is an opportunity for me to also clarify that no venue or club will be responsible for paying the monitoring licences premium; that will be paid by the successful bidder. That is the kind of outlook, but ultimately this will be a fair and balanced approach to awarding the next monitoring licence.

Evan MULHOLLAND: What term will the government look to issue for the new licence – five years, 10 years, 15 years?

Enver ERDOGAN: We are saying, as I answered to Ms Copsey in terms of the time limit for these contracts or licences, it will be determined on a case-by-case basis, so we will be looking at the expert advice. Really, the market will determine that, so there will be a competitive process for the monitoring licence and we will look to maximise public value. But I do not want to predetermine that, because through that competitive process you might get different bidders that make offers based on different timeframes, so we are going to look at all the options to see what captures the best value for Victorians.

Evan MULHOLLAND: How many licence extensions does the government forecast issuing on the public lotteries licence?

Enver ERDOGAN: Mr Mulholland, I might get you to just clarify that question in terms of how many are we looking to extend – are you asking for the term of extension, or are you asking for how many times? Because I think in terms of public lotteries in other jurisdictions, I can say that they have much longer compared to Victoria in terms of their lottery contracts; I was looking at this as this bill was coming to be debated and in the drafting of the legislation. Therefore I would say that would be, again, something that would be determined through the market conditions at the time in terms of something that leads to a better public outcome. For a longer term, you might have a long contract, but if through that process we find that something shorter is in Victoria's interest, that is what might be the case. But I do not want to predetermine that.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Can the minister outline the requirements around the phasing out of cheque payments and the path forward for businesses?

Enver ERDOGAN: We are committed to ensuring that consumer protections are strengthened in Victoria's gambling system. The removal of cheques is part of broader efforts to modernise the payment system and reduce risks associated with large immediate cash withdrawals. Moving to safer traceable methods can help prevent impulsive behaviour and support harm minimisation. We are committed to ensuring that there are secure and convenient payment options that are modern and protect consumers. The move away from cheques reflects broader changes in the way money is being managed across our country. With EFT now the standard across most industries, I think most people will have an electronic account, and cheques are less and less commonly used and accepted.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 6 agreed to.

Clause 7 (17:49)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Mulholland, I invite you to move your amendment, which is a suggested amendment to remove the clause.

Evan MULHOLLAND: As explained in my contribution, this is to omit clause 7 and the premium payments, which the bill itself says are a tax, so we are seeking to omit this tax from the bill.

Enver ERDOGAN: The government does not support Mr Mulholland's amendment. Clause 7 empowers the government to request a premium payment for the monitoring licence and precommitment licence, just as it already does for the state's other major gambling licences, including wagering, Keno and public lotteries. Premium payments are not new; they have been part of Victoria's gambling framework for decades. The government's ability to acquire a premium was codified in the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. That legislation also made it clear that such premiums are to be treated as a tax, Mr Mulholland. And you are correct: we have been very up-front about the treatment of these premiums as a tax; that is the way they are normally reported, which remains a longstanding and consistent legal approach.

Clause 7 simply brings the monitoring licence into line with all other major gambling licences, creating consistency across our licensing framework. It is not a new tax on venues, it is a way for the state to secure fair value for an exclusive licence to run Victoria's monitoring and precommitment system. The premium will be paid by the successful bidder, not by everyday Victorians or venues. As a government, we stand for a modern, transparent and fair licensing framework, and we will not apologise for expecting a fair deal for Victorians.

Council divided on clause:

Ayes (20): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom

McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

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

Clause agreed to.

Clauses 8 to 75 agreed to; schedule 1 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (17:59): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (17:59): I move:

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

Council divided on motion:

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

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

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (18:05): I have a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to make miscellaneous amendments to the **Crimes Act 1958**, the **Criminal Procedure Act 2009**, the **Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019**, the **Magistrates' Court Act 1989**, the **Sentencing Act 1991**, the **Social Services Regulation Act 2021**, the **Victoria Police Act 2013** and the **Worker Screening Act 2020** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Adjournment

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:06): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Energy policy

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): (1698) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is an update on the Allan Labor government's new and expanded \$1400 rebate to purchase an Australian-made hot-water heat pump system and how it will benefit families with the cost of living and support local manufacturing.

Housing

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:07): (1699) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building. The action I seek is for the minister to urgently initiate the construction of new social housing in the Macedon Ranges shire municipality. Victoria is in the middle of a housing crisis, but the Allan Labor government has gone missing when it should be building houses for Victorians. Exactly one year ago to the day I asked the minister for housing to tell me when the promised social housing announced in 2020 for Macedon Ranges shire, as part of the four-year Big Housing Build, would be fully completed. At the time of asking only \$12.5 million of the \$30 million promised for social housing in Macedon Ranges shire had been spent. Across four housing projects, only six homes were complete and 19 were still under construction. The minister promised that the government would work to identify other locations to build new social housing, but obviously it has not been working very hard, because when I last looked at the Big Housing Build website in January no more money had been spent and no more projects had been started in the Macedon Ranges shire.

To hide Labor's failure, the government has now totally redesigned the Big Housing Build website. It no longer shows how much investment has been earmarked for which municipality, it no longer shows how many houses have been built from the allocated funding and it does not say how many houses are predicted to be built. The new Big Housing Build website does not show any existing or planned housing projects for the Macedon Ranges shire. The Allan Labor government is totally failing on its housing policy at the very time Victoria is in the middle of a housing crisis. Forty-two per cent of low-income renters are experiencing rental stress, and the private rental crisis is deepening. Since the Big Housing Build began, the number of families on the Victorian housing register has ballooned by at least 24.5 per cent. A record 66,117 families, including 1094 families in the Macedon Ranges, are still waiting for a safe and secure place to call home, but the Labor government is not demonstrating any urgency to help, and I note the minister for housing is leaving rather than listening to this contribution.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Wendy LOVELL: Labor has also fallen well short on its affordable housing promises. Labor committed to building 2900 affordable homes, but Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings revealed just 608 have been completed.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, President, Ms Lovell has just indicated that in leaving the chamber I was not listening to her adjournment. I would seek that she withdraw that on the basis that I find it offensive.

Members interjecting.

David Davis: Further to the point of order, President, whilst it may be inconvenient for the minister, it is literally and factually true that as she moves out there she will not be able to hear clearly –

Harriet Shing: I wasn't listening to her anyway.

David Davis: I rest my case. But the point here is, President, it is hard to have a point of order where what has been said is literally and factually true, although inconvenient for the minister.

The PRESIDENT: A point of order where someone is offended about something is a tough thing for the Chair – to determine what is offensive. I think in this case we will leave it. I have been here for a long time, and a bit of this goes on. I do not like it, but I do not want to set a precedent by ruling that it is offensive. I do not like it. I do not think it is necessary, because people cannot be in this chamber every second.

Wendy LOVELL: The remaining homes are now delayed until 2029, which means desperate Victorians will wait even longer for an affordable home. There is a total lack of accountability from the Allan Labor government for their failure to meet their own housing targets, and now Labor is trying to hide the truth about their failures. The failure of the Big Housing Build is leaving thousands of Victorians without a roof over their heads. Many of my constituents in Macedon Ranges are desperate for housing, but this Labor government has let them down yet again with another broken promise. The minister must urgently identify appropriate sites and initiate construction of new social housing in the Macedon shire.

I do thank the minister for coming back, but I note that she would not have heard it had she got to the corridor.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, again, President, you had just indicated that you did not find this sort of aspersion from Ms Lovell particularly savoury. I then had another reflection on my presence in the chamber as opposed to my leaving the chamber. Yet again this is on the record as some kind of unparliamentary tactic which has no respect for the parliamentary processes that we are here to debate. It is an adjournment matter with an action for the minister. That is all that it is, and nothing more.

The PRESIDENT: I will not rule on that point of order. I will just take it as a comment for future reference.

Corio Bay gas import terminal

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:12): (1700) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for her to urgently reconsider the approval granted to Viva Energy's floating gas terminal in Corio Bay, a project that directly contradicts Victoria's climate commitments and is expressly against the will of the local community. The Corio Bay Viva gas terminal, recently approved by the Allan Labor government, would import up to 160 petajoules of liquefied natural gas annually. While the government claims this project is essential to address anticipated gas shortages, it undermines our state's *Gas Substitution Roadmap* and its emissions target of net zero by 2045. The environmental implications of this project are severe. The project will require dredging in Corio Bay to accommodate LNG tankers, posing significant risks to local marine life, including the critically endangered Burruran dolphin.

Community opposition has been overwhelming. Since 2022 local residents, environment groups and the Greens have campaigned against this project, but the government has shown complete contempt for the community. Not only have they failed to listen, they made the announcement behind closed doors at an industry gala – for shame. Let us not forget that Australia exports over 80 per cent of its gas, so absurdly, importing LNG could result in Victorians buying back our own gas at higher prices. This decision, coupled with the appalling federal approval of Woodside's North West Shelf project, is another signal of a troubling trend of Labor making deliberate choices to prioritise the interests of fossil fuel companies over our climate future, our environmental responsibility and the community. Minister, I urge you to revoke the environmental approval for the Viva Energy gas terminal. Instead, focus on accelerating the transition to renewable energy and supporting communities to get off gas. Our climate, our environment and our future generations depend on decisive climate action now.

Motor neurone disease

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:14): (1701) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is an update on how the Allan Labor government is supporting the fight against motor neurone disease. This year the government contributed \$250,000 to the Big Freeze campaign. The funding helps accelerate vital research and expand access to clinical trials. Continued investment in research is critical not only to better understand the disease but to improve quality of life and care for those living with it. I look forward to the minister's update on how this important work is progressing.

Lord's Prayer

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:15): (1702) My adjournment is to the Leader of the Government in this place, and it relates to the recitation of the Lord's Prayer every day. The action I seek from the minister, almost a year after I stood here and gave voice to nearly 11,000 Victorians who signed a petition in support of the prayer, is to confirm that Labor will stand united with the opposition in rejecting renewed calls by some crossbench parties to remove the Lord's Prayer from this place. We know that before our historic petition, which forced the government backdown, it was a formal Labor Party election policy and commitment to remove the representation of faith from this place. In July last year I had the honour and privilege of being a voice for all Victorians of faith, not just Christians, in saying that this proposal to strip faith from our Parliament was an insult. I say not only Christians because we saw an extraordinary show of unity in a joint statement issued by the Board of Imams Victoria, the Hindu Council of Australia, the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, joining with the Catholic and Anglican churches on this matter.

The Leader of the Government said I was whipping up something that is nothing and said no-one was attempting to remove the prayer, but it was Labor's stated election commitment and in fact she had mentioned it publicly on at least four occasions. We recently saw Ms Purcell and the Leader of the Greens call on the government to honour their commitment to remove the prayer. It is incumbent on the government to stand up for people of faith and stand up for multicultural communities. The crossbench and the Greens would be interested to know about something that I found pretty laughable but thought I should mention – according to a speech to the Assyrian community in the north by Labor member for Northern Metropolitan and government minister Enver Erdogan, it was actually he and the Labor members in the northern suburbs that were able to save the Lord's Prayer and not actually the opposition. I think, make no mistake, this is still Labor policy. They are just sorry there was a backlash.

My action for the Leader of the Government is for an unequivocal statement confirming that Labor fully supports the Lord's Prayer, fully stands with our multifaith communities now and into the future and rejects crossbench attempts to remove the prayer, which is an acknowledgement of responsible service. It is a tradition that is 168 years old and acknowledges a higher power than the Parliament, so it is important for many of our multifaith communities across Victoria, and they can rest assured knowing that the Liberals will back them 100 per cent.

Freedom of speech

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:18): (1703) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for an assurance that proposed protest laws will not infringe on Victorians' right to peacefully protest around places of religious worship. Late last year the Victorian government announced their plans to restrict Victorians' right to protest. Included in these plans was a proposal to introduce new laws to protect the right of people to gather and pray free from fear, harassment and intimidation. The government has suggested that this could include the establishment of safe access areas around places of religious worship to prohibit protest or amendments to existing offences to protect against disturbance of religious gatherings. While we have not yet seen any proposed laws, the details of these laws would be complex and there would be many questions that need to be answered. Until these questions are answered, we do have grave concerns. Take, for

instance, victim-survivors of institutional child abuse, a number of whom recently stood with me in this chamber to call for better access to justice. These proposed laws have the potential to mute their calls. These people were gravely harmed by institutions like the church, and it was only through decades of tireless advocacy, including protests at religious institutions, that their voices are now starting to be heard. These laws risk criminalising things like protests at funerals held at churches for known child sexual abusers and longstanding movements like the Loud Fence, the tying of ribbons outside St Patrick's Cathedral in Ballarat to recognise victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

Banning protests outside places of religious worship using safe access zones is government overreach. It is a perversion of the protections former member Fiona Patten helped enshrine in law for access to abortions. People visiting religious institutions are already protected by our laws that prohibit acts of violence and vilification. By banning protests around places of worship we are in effect banning religious institutions from being held accountable for their wrongdoing. We are also simultaneously failing to do anything meaningful to prevent violence in the community. So I ask: will the Premier provide an assurance that these proposed protest laws will not infringe Victorians' rights to peacefully protest around places of religious worship?

Eastern Victoria Region aged care

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (18:21): (1704) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Ageing, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on two major aged care upgrades in Eastern Victoria. Work started in October on the new \$45.4 million residential aged care facility, delivering 38 new beds to replace the old Lochiel House and Waratah Lodge buildings at Orbost Regional Health. The Allan Labor government is also investing \$69.7 million for a new residential aged care facility in Maffra, which will feature single rooms with private ensuites as well as shared common spaces so residents can socialise.

Inverloch surf beach

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:21): (1705) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and it is a subject that is highly concerning to the people who live along Inverloch and Cape Patterson. It is the ongoing and escalating crisis of coastal erosion. This region is certainly home to vibrant communities, vital ecosystems and cherished public assets, but they are increasingly under threat from storm surges eroding coastline and loss of sand from our beaches.

The Inverloch community has watched with growing alarm as the surf beach dunes have collapsed, eroded and undermined assets. The Inverloch Coastal Advisory Network has been working in good faith with anyone who will work with them where they can, and they wrote to the *Sentinel-Times* on 3 June this year. Minister, they want you to ensure that the cape-to-cape resilience plan is released before the commencement of stage 1 works in spring so that the community can have confidence in the direction and scope of the project. They want transparency and openness, something that this government struggles with from one day to the next. The community also seeks confirmation that stage 1 beach nourishment and dune reconstruction works will begin in early September and be completed before the end of spring, as previously indicated. These works are critical in stabilising the coastline ahead of the next storm season.

Cost-effective, innovative solutions proposed by community groups, including the installation of a permanent sand slurry pipeline to facilitate future renourishment efforts, must be seriously considered, and these are already happening in various other places around Australia, including Maroochydore. This would also look to reduce those long-term costs and environmental impacts. The community groups are also calling for an additional \$3 million to \$5 million to complete part B of the initial renourishment works, specifically looking at sand renourishment between Flat Rocks and the Inverloch Road rock wall. Finally, I echo the community's call for long-term funding to deliver the cape-to-cape pathway over the next decade.

Minister, you are fully aware of these issues, I know, but you have committed in the budget \$10 million for six communities. Dividing that is insufficient. It will not be enough. We do not want moving sandcastles; we actually need a long-term solution. It is a vexed problem, but literally not doing anything about it other than some small sand movements is not acceptable to this community. I ask that you focus your attention on these issues and respond.

ADHD services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:24): (1706) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to commit to a review of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 and related regulations to enable GPs to perform diagnostic assessments and prescribe for ADHD. Since 2017 specialist GPs in Queensland have been able to diagnose ADHD in young people under the age of 18, as well as prescribe for and manage their treatment. Recently New South Wales and Western Australia brought about reforms to follow suit, extending GP diagnosis and prescription to all people seeking treatment, no matter their age. The ACT has flagged its intention to do the same.

Specialist ADHD assessments with a psychiatrist can cost up to \$2000. There are very limited publicly funded services providing ADHD assessments in Victoria and none in Victoria for adults over 25. Factor in prohibitive wait times that can stretch to three months even in the private system, shortages of psychiatrists in regional and rural communities and a cost-of-living crisis – no wonder up to 480,000 Victorians could be living with ADHD but many are unable to access diagnosis and treatment.

For Victorians who languish on waitlists or decide to put off pursuing a diagnosis altogether, the statistics do not reflect the true impact that barriers to these appointments have on their day-to-day lives. Kids get left behind in classrooms, nurses battle to retain the details of their start-of-shift handovers and engineers struggle to stay on track as project meetings stretch out. Others face barriers in various aspects of their life, impacting employment opportunities, interpersonal relationships and their own wellbeing. To not be granted the opportunity of an assessment and diagnosis, as well as appropriate forms of treatment which might include but is not limited to medication, only further stigmatises an experience that we now know many share. In fact one in every 20 Australians are thought to live with features of ADHD.

A federal Senate inquiry report tabled in 2023 highlighted all of the above issues and made numerous recommendations to improve access to care, many of which still need to be acted on. It is good to see other Australian jurisdictions taking positive steps to address these access issues, and Victoria should follow their lead. GPs are well placed to provide ADHD care. In fact they already do everything except the bits they are currently not allowed to around diagnosis and prescribing. Provided the GP has appropriate training, undertaking assessments and initiating prescribing is well within their scope of practice. People living with ADHD should not be forced to wait for months to see a psychiatrist and pay thousands of dollars for an appointment, only to have their treatment managed as separate from the rest of their health care. Experts and consumers agree that it is time to change the way we think about ADHD.

Education system

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:27): (1707) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to update me on the rollout of the schoolwide positive behaviour support program, particularly in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region. All Victorian government school students deserve to learn in classrooms that are safe, calm and conducive to learning and teaching. It is great to see this program being expanded to nearly double the availability for over 800 Victorian government schools. The reason why so many of us joined in this place were pleased to hear about the expansion of this program is because it has been implemented already and has worked. It has helped teachers to make their classrooms safer, more productive and more respectful, and that benefits everyone. It is important that

when the schools tell us this program has worked, we listen to them and take their feedback on board. Listening to teachers is important – it is important for the kids in the classroom, and it is important for us in this place. Our strategy provides for universal support, targeted support and individualised support, because a strategy which might work for some students might not work for some students who demonstrate the most challenging behaviours. I look forward to working with the minister to deliver for my community of the Southern Metro.

Victims of crime

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:29): (1708) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Victims. The action that I seek is for the minister to meet with the family of Jack, the 18-year-old who was brutally assaulted in Pakenham, and explain what immediate steps the government is taking to stop this consistent pattern of youth gang attacks. Jack was recently at a birthday party. He was about to head home, which he should be able to do, and he was grabbed, dragged away and bashed by a group of masked youths. Not only was he beaten unconscious – they filmed it, they celebrated it and they posted it online like it was a massive achievement. His eye socket was fractured, and he is awaiting some surgery. He now has double vision and ongoing trauma. His parents were forced to drive him to hospital themselves because they waited over 2 hours for an ambulance which never came. When Jack's mother contacted the Premier, she heard nothing back – not a call, not even a reply. But she did hear from Victims of Crime, who told her to expect a call back within three to five days. This is not justice. This is an absolute joke not just for one boy but for every Victorian relying on the basic promise of safety and justice.

What Labor have done is they have cut \$78 million from police and court funding. They have watched police stations around the state reduce their hours or shut their doors due to understaffing. And they have allowed our courts to become so backlogged that serious offenders walk free on bail, sometimes within just 90 minutes of being arrested. It took Labor 471 days to finally act on our call to ban machetes, and that was just the lowest possible hanging fruit. It only takes one horrific experience to destroy a whole family, and probably that family will never be rebuilt in a lifetime in some of these situations. I urge the Minister for Victims to do something about it and meet with the family.

LGBTQIA+ youth support

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:31): (1709) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Equality, and the action I seek is for the minister to respond to the requests of young queer people in the Minus18 *Queer Youth Now* report. Only 6 per cent of queer young people feel that the government does a good job of understanding and listening to people like them. Minus18 just released their national survey of LGBTQIA+ youth in Australia, titled *Queer Youth Now*. Nearly 3000 young queer people took this survey, and it paints a clear picture of how much more work needs to be done. Eighty-nine per cent of LGBTQIA+ young people have experienced bullying, harassment and violence in their lifetime. Seventy per cent said they had been negatively impacted by news and media portrayals of LGBTQIA+ issues in the past year. When the media, when politicians use LGBTQIA+ people for their culture wars, the result is that young people feel left behind and are subjected to bullying and harassment and the result is the removal of life-saving gender-affirming care, as we have seen happen in places like Queensland and as is wanted by some here.

This data also shows something extremely concerning: young queer people are going back into the closet when they participate in sports groups and when they enter the workforce. With the continued stream of homophobia I have experienced since being elected, I understand. It is why I am so outwardly proud of my own identity. But there are things the government can do. Young queer people have laid out some really basic and really easy first steps to start getting us on the right track. They have asked for more LGBTQIA+ student groups in their schools. They have asked for people to respect gender identity and pronouns, for people to publicly show support for the queer community and learn more about queer lives and for the government to make an effort to understand and listen to people like them. These are bare minimum asks, and much more is needed to fully address the hate

and marginalisation that queer people face. Growing up, being that young queer kid, I know that feeling seen, feeling listened to and being welcomed would have made a huge difference, so I implore you to do more.

Energy policy

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (18:33): (1710) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me and visit one of the many households in the Southern Metropolitan Region who have accessed the government's solar homes rebate or the Victorian energy upgrade discounts and installed new energy-efficient heat pumps or hot-water systems. Labor is supporting households to save on their energy bills through rebates for solar panels, through rebates for heat pumps and through support for energy-efficient upgrades that both save households on their energy bills and are good for the environment. These programs are win-win.

Cruise ships

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:34): (1711) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and is regarding the Allan Labor government's hasty decision to increase cruise ship port fees, an economic decision that is already costing Victorians millions of dollars in revenue from tourism. The action I seek from the minister is to urgently review and reverse the port fee hikes that have driven major cruise lines away from Melbourne and have triggered a sharp decline in tourism revenue. In November 2023 the Allan government increased berthing charges at Station Pier by 15 per cent. Since then two world-renowned cruise lines, Cunard and Princess, have pulled their ships from Melbourne. Cunard has exited Australian ports entirely, while Princess now docks in Sydney and Brisbane. These were not minor operators. Together they accounted for 25 visits to Station Pier in 2024 alone, with ships carrying more than 3000 passengers, nearly double the average capacity of other cruise liners. According to an independent analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office, this decision will result in 113 fewer cruise ships visiting Melbourne between 2025 and 2028, 138,000 fewer cruise tourists visiting our city, a \$27.8 million hit to tourism spending and a \$9.8 million loss in port revenue.

This is not just a tourism issue, it is an economic failure. Local businesses are already feeling the impact. Limousine operators, hospitality venues and their suppliers who benefit from cruise traffic are now seeing bookings dry up. One operator described the drop in cruise-related business as a complete reversal from the post-COVID boom. And now it is not just the tourism sector that is hurting, it is the loss of cruise ship provisioning, everything from fresh produce to beverages. Many Victorian suppliers are missing out on millions in trade. These ships need to source large volumes of goods locally, supporting jobs and small businesses across the state. By hiking up the fee Premier Allan has effectively handed Victoria's cruise industries to other states on a silver platter. Queensland and New South Wales are now reaping the benefits of the Allan Labor government's short-sighted action. So again, I ask the minister: where is the cruise strategy? Where is the plan to restore confidence in Melbourne as a cruise destination, because right now we are seeing that the Allan government cannot manage money, cannot manage tourism and is leaving Victorian businesses to pay the price.

Energy policy

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:36): (1712) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources. I had the pleasure of meeting with Master Electricians Australia recently, and they outlined some challenges and concerns facing their sector. It would be no surprise that one of the issues they highlighted was labour competition with government infrastructure projects and also private sector, large-scale renewable energy projects. Of particular concern was the loss of third- and fourth-year apprentices to these projects, creating a disincentive for small and medium businesses to take on new apprentices – a particular problem with a significant skills shortage looming. They also noted that requirements for face-to-face continuing professional development may have a greater impact on small businesses, as some courses can be

completed online. The changes flagged to apprentice supervision were also noted for their potential impact. Changing the rules to require one-to-one supervision does not allow for the specific requirements of different workplaces or consider the difference between a first-year apprentice and an apprentice just weeks away from full qualification. The MEA called for more flexibility.

They also expressed some concern about a new proposed licensing scheme related to consumer energy resource installations, mostly solar panels. There is already a federal scheme, and this could create unnecessary duplication. With the federal government looking at improving productivity and challenges in Victoria with energy infrastructure rollouts and skills shortages, their submission represents a thoughtful contribution. My request to the minister is to give due consideration to this submission, particularly the request for updated guidance around the new powers and penalties with the recently passed Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Act 2025.

Ambulance services

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:38): (1713) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. It is a really heartbreaking matter in fact. Last Thursday an elderly man in Blackburn called 000 after falling in his home and suffering a serious head injury. When no-one arrived, he called again, and despite being just a few minutes from Box Hill Hospital, it took almost 5 hours for an ambulance to reach him. By the time the paramedics arrived and firefighters forced entry, the man had, tragically, passed away. Reports now confirm that multiple ambulance crews were sitting outside Box Hill Hospital for this entire time, ramped and unable to respond. They were waiting for their current patients to be admitted and were not allowed to leave despite the emergency call. The paramedics who later attended the scene were reportedly distraught by what they found and the knowledge that they could have helped had they been free to do so.

I think if you just imagine it was one of your loved ones in this situation and the idea that you could call for an ambulance and it not arrive in such a critical situation – to me, it is just another breach of the social contract between government and the people. We accept taxes and we accept difficult decisions, but there is a basic return on that, and that is that when you call an ambulance in a life-threatening situation one comes, and to think that one was so close is just heartbreaking for that family, and my deepest condolences go to them. Sadly, this case is just the latest and most heartbreaking example of what happens when nothing changes. No amount of health funding announcements means anything if ambulances cannot get to people in time; no-one in Victoria should die when help is parked around the corner. The man deserved better, and his tragic death must lead to action, not just another review or internal report that this was preventable. The health system did not just fail, it abandoned him in his most vulnerable moment. It is unacceptable, and it must not happen again.

The action I seek from the minister is to implement urgent reforms to reduce ambulance ramping and improve emergency department capacity at hospitals like Box Hill, and Ambulance Victoria must be properly supported to ensure paramedics are never again prevented from responding to life-threatening calls to duty due to hospital delays.

Mental health workforce

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:41): (1714) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health and relates to the wages and working conditions of Victorian mental healthcare workers. Today on the front steps of this place, at the rally organised by the Health and Community Services Union, those of us in attendance heard of a crumbling mental health sector whose workers are at breaking point. Our mental health workers are on the front line, and they face Victoria's worsening mental health crisis. Today on the steps we remembered the 772 Victorians who died from suicide just last year. Mental health workers have been engaging in industrial actions over the last 11 months while this government continues to offer them a subpar enterprise bargaining agreement. Half of all mental health workers reported being assaulted at work once a week, with one in 10 reporting them daily. A staggering 97 per cent of social workers and occupational therapists, who are core to the delivery of public mental health service delivery, have indicated that they will leave the

public sector if key demands are not met. This is a scary proposition. Victoria's mental health workers are overworked, underpaid and clearly undervalued by this government. Minister, the action that I seek is for this government to listen to the demands of mental health workers and deliver an agreement that rightfully compensates workers with the pay and conditions that they deserve.

Treaty

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:42): (1715) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, and the action I seek is that she immediately halt the statewide treaty process until the government comprehensively explains to the people of Victoria what treaty actually means. Last week the minister told the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee she wants treaty legislation introduced this year and a statewide treaty signed by June 2025. It assumes the public agrees that treaty is inevitable, but there has been no consultation and no informed mandate from the Victorian people – in fact quite the opposite. The Labor government is going against the will of Victorians. In 2023 Australians overwhelmingly rejected the Voice to Parliament – 60 per cent said no; every state voted no – yet now this treaty process seeks to undo that clear verdict by institutionalising racial divisions through law and government. This is not reconciliation, it is racism enshrined in legislation.

Speaking personally, I strongly believe the result of the Voice referendum underlines that our state government is absolutely wrong to take public support for these measures for granted. In my own region of Western Victoria every federal electorate rejected the Voice; the minister cannot ignore that message. She cannot presume consent. She cannot legislate away democracy in the hope that no-one notices. We are already seeing the real-world consequences of Labor's radical agenda, with the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk agreement quietly signed in western Victoria. This arrangement struck between the state government and the Barengi Gadjin Land Council was never debated in this chamber, never put to the voters and never explained to the councils now expected to fund and enforce it. Under this agreement unelected land councils will be given influence over planning decisions, water rights, natural resources, naming rights, road sites, health strategies and even local rates, despite not contributing to them.

We are witnessing the erosion of democratic principles. When Australians overwhelmingly rejected the Voice to Parliament, it was a clear rejection of racial division embedded in our government and our institutions. But now treaty is being advanced in this state without a clear definition of what it is, what it means, who it covers and what the public will be required to fund or forfeit. Minister, if you proceed with treaty without a mandate, you are not governing, you are ruling. You cannot speak of justice whilst silencing the will of the Victorian people.

Community safety

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:45): (1716) My matter for the adjournment is for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and it relates to a statement I have in my possession dated the 16th of the 6th – that is yesterday.

Earlier this afternoon, Temple Beth Israel was the target of an antisemitic act of vandalism when a swastika was painted on the front signage of our building. We are grateful to report that the graffiti was removed ... thanks to swift and coordinated efforts of TBI staff, Community Security Group (CSG), Victoria Police, and the Port Phillip Council.

I am reporting an incident that has now been dealt with, which is the one pleasant side of this.

We acknowledge the deep concern many in our community are feeling as the situation between Israel and Iran continues to unfold.

They talk about the need to protect and support TBI and the broader Jewish community. This is signed by four people, including the senior rabbi Allison Conyer and the cantor Michel Laloum.

What I am seeking from the minister is that she reach out to members of Temple Beth Israel – and not just Temple Beth Israel but other Jewish community organisations that have not been given the support

and not been given the reassurance that they need. We have seen, obviously, a series of incidents. We have seen the terrible incident at the Adass institution, the Adass facility, but also so many other examples, whether it be at schools or elsewhere. I think the time has arrived for state government ministers to become much, much more active in working with the Jewish community, ensuring that the community feels safe, acting ahead of time. I mean, this is clearly not stopping, these terrible incidents, and this recent example – and it is by far the least serious of other ones, but nonetheless it is a very serious and offensive approach that has been adopted, putting a swastika onto the main signage of TBI. I really just feel that the state government has not been prepared to step forward and really engage with the Jewish community and to ensure that these things stop. We still do not have that clear statement that is needed, that clear indication that the state government really values our Jewish community in the way it should.

Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:48): (1717) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to funding for the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance. We know that it took a hit in 2024 with the budget, with funding reduced from \$9.5 million a year, which was allocated in the 2020–21 budget, down to just \$7.5 million over four years. It was an extraordinary hit to that very important investment in that important area, and it is an important area because Victoria is facing a tsunami of cancer cases, with 40,000 cases a year diagnosed. This is predicted to reach 50,000 a year by 2032 – that is not very far away, in seven years time, and without immediate investment –

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: They are winding back funding, Mr Davis, but without the immediate investment, it is the reality that one in three Victorians will continue to die from cancer. They do terrific work, the VCCC Alliance, and regional Victorians are 10 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with cancer than those living in major cities. There is a real inequity in the ability to address this issue, with 15 per cent more likely to die because of their cancer diagnosis. Patients with cancer living in regional and rural Victoria are further disadvantaged by experiencing lower five-year survival rates than those living in metropolitan areas – 69 per cent compared to 73 per cent respectively.

As I said, the VCCC Alliance took a massive hit in last year's budget. The \$1.37 million in the 2025 budget over two years to maintain the centre for cancer immunotherapy falls drastically short of delivering critical anti-cancer activity at a time when it is needed most. The government talks about their cancer plan; well, they do need the investment if they are to achieve those goals.

The action I seek from the minister is to not only justify the gap in those funding shortfalls but really request that the government fund the VCCC Alliance's full amount of \$17.5 million over the forward estimates to help the government deliver its *Victorian Cancer Plan* goals by 2028. Without that investment it is simply not going to happen. With the inequity between regional and metropolitan Victorians, those living in regional Victoria are going to be further disadvantaged. It is absolutely critical that those funding cuts be reversed and that this investment take place.

Responses

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:51): There were 20 adjournments this evening. Given that the Minister for Housing and Building is in the chamber, she will directly respond to the adjournment raised by Ms Lovell. The remaining 19 adjournments will be referred to the relevant and appropriate ministers.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:51): I would never suggest in this place that Ms Lovell looking at her phone, scrolling through Facebook or otherwise not paying attention in the committee stage of a bill indicated the conclusion that she was not interested in the

parliamentary process, and I would never for a second cast an aspersion that Ms Lovell being asleep in the chamber is something which –

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, the minister is supposed to be responding to my adjournment, not casting aspersions.

Harriet SHING: That is why I just said I would never –

Wendy Lovell: Well, you are. I am offended, and she should withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: Can I call the minister back to responding, please.

Harriet SHING: I would never suggest, Ms Lovell, that you have ever fallen asleep in this chamber. What I will do, however, is give you some answers to a question on housing, which I have actually addressed in this place before, so you might want to go back and have a look at *Hansard* lest you were not concentrating or paying attention at that time.

Wendy Lovell interjected.

Harriet SHING: Do not laugh at what I am saying, Ms Lovell. Housing is a very serious matter.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, this is a serious matter for my community. The minister has taken the information off the website and hidden it from public view. I am not laughing at the minister. She is casting aspersions in this house that are not true. The minister should just answer the question and get on with it but also get on with building the promised housing in the Macedon Ranges shire that was supposed to be –

The PRESIDENT: Ms Lovell, you have got on the record what I think you wanted on the record, and now you are debating the adjournment matter. The minister to respond on the adjournment matter.

Harriet SHING: It is a pity, Ms Lovell, that you keep interrupting while I am trying to address what is a very serious issue. If you could perhaps communicate to your constituents what you are failing to do on your feet with the information that I am about to give you now.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, the minister is just flouting your ruling now – absolutely flouting it.

The PRESIDENT: The minister to respond to the adjournment matter from Ms Lovell.

Harriet SHING: I would invite you, Ms Lovell, to perhaps go back and have a look at *Hansard* –

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, the minister is flouting your ruling. I have the answer from *Hansard* to what I asked last year. I want an update on that. You have hidden this information, and my constituents deserve to know where you are in failing to deliver this program.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister is trying to respond and maybe just indicating that there is a response in *Hansard* as well.

Harriet SHING: I was actually referring to *Hansard* for your adjournment this evening, Ms Lovell. Casting aspersions is perhaps not something that would be particularly productive, as I think you have just discovered.

The investment that we have made across the Macedon shire, which will be under the Big Housing Build alone, commits to invest \$30 million, which will be done over the next 12 months, and there is a \$12.5 million investment –

Wendy Lovell interjected.

Harriet SHING: Ms Lovell, this is a serious matter, and you should stop interrupting and paying lip-service to housing for some of the most vulnerable people in Victoria.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, this is a serious matter. The minister has failed in this program.

The PRESIDENT: That is debating again.

Wendy Lovell interjected.

The PRESIDENT: You might not like the response, but the minister is responding.

Harriet SHING: The \$12.5 million investment that I was referring to earlier – before you stopped paying attention, Ms Lovell; eyes up – across all of our programs is for the 25 homes that have been committed, and 13 of those homes are complete. And I just want to also confirm –

Wendy Lovell: But that was the same last October.

Harriet SHING: Sorry – again, interjections, Ms Lovell, show that perhaps you are not paying attention, and that is unfortunate given the serious nature of the matter of housing for vulnerable Victorians. But what I would highlight is that 74 per cent of the \$6.3 billion across the Regional Housing Fund and the Big Housing Build has been committed already and that 13 of the 18 local government areas have met or exceeded their minimum investment guarantees under the Big Housing Build regional funding.

I just want to make sure also that you are aware of a number of supports and programs, including through Wintringham and the sort of supports that we partner with the community housing sector on. Ms Lovell, if you actually ever do start to take the question of housing for vulnerable Victorians seriously rather than laughing at this, I would be happy to give you a briefing.

Wendy Lovell: President, that is offensive, and I ask for a withdrawal.

Harriet SHING: I am done, President.

The PRESIDENT: Yes. I think I have heard similar things. I think we will just take it that the minister has finished.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, I am absolutely offended by that comment, and I ask for a withdrawal.

The PRESIDENT: I will ask the minister to withdraw.

Harriet Shing: President, in withdrawing, can I ask Ms Lovell to also withdraw what she cast as an aspersion earlier this evening, which was not found to be something that was offensive.

The PRESIDENT: I think that your statement that Ms Lovell has disregard for – I cannot even remember the words.

Harriet Shing: No, I said that if she did I would be happy to give her a briefing.

The PRESIDENT: No, I think it was more where you indicated Ms Lovell has a disregard for public housing tenants or homeless people.

Harriet Shing: She kept interrupting.

The PRESIDENT: I understand that, but I will ask you to withdraw that part of it, please.

Harriet Shing: I do withdraw that bit, and Ms Lovell should stay awake for the rest of the proceedings in the house.

Wendy Lovell: President, on a point of order, that is offensive too.

The PRESIDENT: Minister, as I sometimes say to other members of this chamber when they are asked to withdraw and they add a bit of flourish, can you just say, 'I withdraw.'

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Harriet Shing: Yes. I withdraw. I am looking forward to helping Ms Lovell to better understand what we are doing.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:58): I have three outstanding adjournments: questions 1534, 1558 and 1621. The first one was due on 18 April, the second on 2 May and the final one on 13 June. None of them have been answered.

The PRESIDENT: Can the minister at the table please follow that up for the house.

Gayle Tierney: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:59 pm.