Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 1 April 2026

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Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

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Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

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David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

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

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

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

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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

[1] Resigned 27 September 2023
[2] ALP until 29 April 2024
[3] Sworn in 6 February 2024
[4] ALP until 5 August 2023
[5] Resigned 13 February 2026
[6] Greens until 1 November 2024
[7] Resigned 23 November 2024
[8] Sworn in 4 March 2025
[9] Resigned 6 January 2025
[10] Resigned 7 July 2023
[11] Sworn in 3 October 2023
[12] Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 1 April 2026

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

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I raise with you an incident that occurred at the very end of the day yesterday, at the first available opportunity, in relation to standing order 119, not 118, and I know at the time there was a consideration of it being a standing order 118 issue when it was not; it was 119. Last night the member for Oakleigh reflected across multiple members throughout the adjournment debate. It was unedifying. There has been ongoing bullying of the member for Warrandyte, which has occurred for several months. I would say the behaviour last night was unedifying and was a breach of standing order 119, and I would ask you to, at the very least, speak to the member about not doing that in the adjournment debate.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Brighton, for your point of order. I would like to advise the house that it was remiss of me last night not to call out the minister on the language that he was using in the chamber. It was a breach of standing order 119, and I have spoken to the minister about that matter.

I remind members that standing orders are there for a reason. The reason they are there is so that respect is maintained in this chamber. That respect goes to thinking about the language that is used by every member when they are on their feet. It is not a hard thing to be respectful.

Bills

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:35): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to establish Outdoor Recreation Victoria, to establish the Land Access Panel, to repeal the Game Management Authority Act 2014 and the Victorian Fisheries Authority Act 2016, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:36): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:36): It is a pleasure. This bill is a revolutionary bill. We are very excited about it. The Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026 delivers the government's vision to enable and strengthen outdoor recreation in Victoria by consolidating the Victorian Fisheries Authority, VFA, and the Game Management Authority, GMA, into a new statutory authority, Outdoor Recreation Victoria, ORV, with an expanded scope to promote Victorians' ability to get out in the great outdoors and enjoy low-cost and free activities.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the early childhood education, school education,

vocational education and training and adult, community and further education system, to require schools to develop policies to restrict student use of personal electronic devices during school hours and to improve the operation of that act and to amend the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 to make a statute law revision amendment and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:37): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): Essentially, the bill does four things: it strengthens Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the education system, it bans the use of personal electronic devices across all schools, it improves the teacher registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching and it expands the Victorian student register and makes minor and technical amendments as well.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Roads, Road Safety and Ports Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:38): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Road Safety Act 1986, the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013, the Road Management Act 2004, the EastLink Project Act 2004, the Melbourne City Link Act 1995, the North East Link Act 2020, the West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019, the Port Management Act 1995, the Marine Safety Act 2010, the Rail Management Act 1996 and the Transport Integration Act 2010 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:39): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:39): The Roads, Road Safety and Ports Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 will deliver a range of legislative amendments in the roads and road safety and ports and freight portfolios to improve road safety, achieve administrative efficiencies and provide for improved data collection and sharing.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Residential Tenancies Amendment (Rent Controls) Bill 2026

Introduction

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:40): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to provide that rent increases under residential tenancies agreements must not exceed certain amounts and for other purposes.

Everyone deserves a home they can afford. That should not depend on luck, on family wealth or on navigating a rigged system, but right now that is exactly what is happening. Wages have stagnated while rents continue to rise, and that is because under Labor your rent can go up by however much your property investor wants to put it up. In the last five years rents have gone up 2½ times faster than wages. For many renters it is not a question of if the rents will go up, it is by how much and whether they can survive it. Will they have to skip meals? Will they have to put off seeing the doctor? Will they have to pull their kids out of school, pack up and leave their home? And now this: global shocks having local impacts. We know what happens when costs start to rise: property investors seek to

preserve their own profits, and it is renters who bear the brunt. For hundreds of thousands of renters, many of whom are joining us today, living in rental stress another rent hike could just push them over the edge. That is why today we must debate this bill for an immediate rent freeze to protect renters from the growing cost-of-living crisis, from rising fuel prices and from growing interest rates, because what renters need right now is stability and an immediate rent freeze will give them stability and confidence.

The rental crisis is a political choice. The major old parties have created a system that perpetuates inequality – a system that serves the property industry, the banks, the developers and wealthy investors whose profits depend on rents continuing to rise without limits and a system that favours the interests of their donors rather than the people they are supposed to represent. As a result, inequality in Victoria is deepening, and without rent controls wealth will continue to concentrate in the hands of those who already own properties.

Today the Greens are putting forward a different choice. This bill will make unlimited rent increases illegal. It introduces a two-year rent freeze, an emergency circuit breaker to give renters breathing room and allow wages the chance to catch up. After that it caps rent increases so they simply cannot rise faster than wages. We know what Labor and the Liberals will say. They will say rent controls do not work. They will say, 'What about taxes?' They will say investors will flee the state and rental supply will collapse. They will say, 'Haven't we done enough already?' They will bang on about the tinkering and the tweaks they have made under pressure from the Greens and the community, but here is the truth: as long as unlimited rent increases are still legal, renters will continue to live in insecure, unaffordable housing. Rent controls already exist across the world, including in 16 European countries and in the ACT, where the Greens in government introduced rent controls, the only jurisdiction in Australia where rents have not gone up drastically out of sync with wages, and the sky has not fallen in. Let us be clear about this panic of moral investor flight. When a property investor sells a property, it is bought by someone else. Maybe that will be someone who has long been locked out of home ownership, maybe a young growing family, or perhaps it will be bought by another property investor and it will remain a rental. What the property does not do is disappear.

So we can continue down the current path, where rents keep rising more and more and people are pushed into housing stress and homelessness, or we can act. If a landlord cannot afford to keep a long-term rental, they can sell. It does not have to be this way. Unlimited rent increases should be illegal. It is not a radical idea. It is common sense, and it is urgently needed. Let us give renters a fair deal. Let us cap rent increases so you can afford your home and even save for the future. We need rent controls, and we need them now.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (09:44): I oppose the introduction of this bill primarily because – and I know it is April Fools' Day, but renters should not be treated like fools – the Greens introduced a near identical bill in the Legislative Council I believe two years ago and have left it to languish and die. If this was the transformational move that they claim it is, why have they left it sitting in the upper house since 2023? The Greens are trying to pass off a stale bill as fresh action, because why would they want to do anything more than run a brand? This is classic Greens politics.

The Greens have never built a thing, but we know that the best way to make more rentals available and to drive down rents is to build more homes, and Victoria continues to build and approve thousands more homes than any other state in the country. Melbourne's average rent is below the national average, including in the ACT, which the Greens have highlighted as an example of where these controls work. They do not work. This is classic Greens politics: it is maximum outrage and minimum honesty about their own record. And we know that the members opposite, at every opportunity they have, whether it is in the Council or indeed in this place, block housing developments. We know that the member who is seeking to introduce this bill has done it herself.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate about the first reading of a bill, and it is not an opportunity to attack other members of the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: The member for Footscray will come back to the procedural motion.

Katie HALL: The bill that is being sought to be introduced is exactly the same as the bill that the Greens introduced to the upper house two years ago, and for that reason I believe that this is a stunt. It comes on a day when Victoria has introduced reforms from the Allan Labor government that are making renting fairer. Victoria is the best place in Australia to rent a property, and the reason it is the best place in Australia to rent a property is not only because it is cheaper but because we have introduced more than 150 protections, including a nation-leading rental bond scheme.

Renters need real relief and more homes, not a Greens slogan which can go out on TikTok or in a media release or whatever. We are introducing real reforms, and I know the Greens like to take credit for every reform that the Labor government introduces – they are very good at it. But we know, when it comes to the reality of what the Greens actions are, that when the member for Richmond was on Yarra council she voted down social and affordable housing in her community. We have seen it time and time again, so do not be disingenuous. Those opposite should not be disingenuous with the renters of Victoria, because in Victoria the Allan Labor government has transformed renting with more than 150 reforms.

I did some googling this morning, and one of the things I have been really concerned about is the way the Greens political party are actively scaring people in public housing. They are running around telling public housing tenants that they will be homeless and not that we are building new livable homes for those communities. But I also discovered that the member for Richmond is running a fundraiser. She is selling bottles of merlot to 'stop the de-merlot-ition'. So after a hard day campaigning and scaring people, you go – *(Time expired)*

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:50): I rise to speak on this debate and talk about why it is such an urgent debate and why this bill, the Greens bill for rent controls, must urgently be debated and passed through this Parliament today. One in three Victorian households now rent. That is not a niche issue. These are not just students renting for a short period before they can go and buy their own home; these are working people with good full-time jobs who cannot afford to buy a house and believe now that they might be renting their entire lives.

Renters are people who contact me with their stories every single week – people like Petra from Princes Hill, whose landlord has owned her rental for more than 20 years and has made no updates to the property in that time but still tries to increase her rent by between 11 and 17 per cent every single year. It is Petra who has to go and fight that rent increase. There is Ruby in the CBD, whose rent in my electorate has increased more than 10 per cent every year for the last five years – 50 per cent in the last five years alone. Meg pays two-thirds of her income in rent and is too afraid to ask for repairs out of fear of a rent increase or fear that she will be evicted. Natasha told me that her real estate agent said she would get a good rental reference as long as she did not make any maintenance requests while she lived in the property. How are people supposed to live like this? How could it not be urgent for Parliament to finally, finally do something to actually address this crisis, bring in rent controls in Victoria and make sure that people's rent is not so out of whack with wages?

The thing is that the rental crisis does not just hurt individual renters; it actually hurts the entire community and it hurts the economy, because every rent increase is a dollar that cannot be spent at the local cafe, at the footy or at the local shoe shop buying school shoes for the kids. Instead, it is a dollar that goes straight into a landlord's pocket, and research shows that that money is far less likely to flow back into our local shopping strips and communities. Rent controls are deflationary, meaning that they also support mortgage holders because they put downward pressure on inflation and downward pressure on interest rates, which benefits everybody.

It is young Victorians who are paying the highest price here – young people that are being forced out of our inner suburbs, the suburbs that they study in, that they work in and that they perhaps grew up in, and they are being pushed further and further out just to find a place that they can afford. That

means longer commutes, more money on transport, less time for study and less time for friends and family when you are young. It means more pressure to pick up extra shifts just to cover the rent. And we are forcing an entire generation to choose between their education or having an affordable roof over their head. That affordable rental corridor that once ran through suburbs in my electorate – North Melbourne, Carlton, Fitzroy, Brunswick, Northcote – has almost completely vanished in our city. The creative studios, the share houses and the first apartments that people got when they moved out of home are now almost entirely gone. Melbourne, especially inner Melbourne, is at risk of becoming a city without young people. Think about that – a city without artists and without the people who give it its life and its soul. A city where nurses, cleaners and baristas cannot afford to live anywhere near where they work, and when they finish their shift they have to travel an hour to get home and an hour back in. What kind of city is that? It is not the city that we know, and it is not the city that we should be creating.

Right now in Victoria there is no legal limit on how much a landlord can increase your rent – none. The only option renters have is to challenge an increase after the fact, bearing all the costs and all the stress themselves. It is simply not fair. It is not a fair system. It is a system that is rigged against the people who can least afford it. It is rigged against renters, it is rigged against young people and it is rigged against the working class. It is time to do things differently. We can look overseas at the 16 European countries that have some form of rent control. We can also look here in our own backyard in the ACT, where a Greens–Labor government introduced rent controls that are working. Rent controls work, and we can adopt one of these models here in Victoria to make sure that people can actually afford the roof over their head. There is no reason why Labor could not do this tomorrow if they had the guts.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:55): Well, well, well – we know it is an election year when the Greens start using words like 'rigged' and 'urgent'. Anything when it comes to the Greens is urgent because they are a party running out of ideas. They are a party running on fumes. They are a party that only opens their offices four days a week. They spend no time here in the chamber debating the really important stuff. Four days a week on taxpayers money their offices are open, and they come here with a recycled press release to pretend to put forward a new bill before this house. Well, you are caught out. It is an election year, so hear me clearly when I say we will not be lectured by the Greens, who have a substantive record of standing in the way of not only Victorians but vulnerable Victorians, including young Victorians – Greens voters – by peddling false information that time and time again they are called out on here in this place. The only problem is we cannot put it on social media because the Greens never turn up to Parliament. So it is absolutely fantastic to have three of you, the full Greens party, in the chamber today to hear a reckoning and hear the truth about your party.

The Greens party have never delivered a single piece of housing infrastructure in this state. They have time and time again blocked housing, whether it is here in this Parliament as part of our important policy and legislative reform to build more homes, to get people into homes and to enable people to afford their rent. They talk about our government tinkering around the edges. We have made 150 impactful –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, there is a lot of talk about misinformation in politics at the moment, and I think it is incumbent upon members to not misinform the house. The point of order is that the member for Laverton is misinforming the house and misleading the house, because the Greens did not vote against the bill that she says we did.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Misinformation is something that is incredibly dangerous during an election year, and I will note that those opposite, the Greens party, provided their own little bit of misinformation recently, claiming that it was their idea for free public transport during a fuel emergency and crisis – to introduce free public transport here in this state in April. What a joke – talk about misinformation.

Even my 12-year-old was able to call out the member for Richmond for telling such little furphies, I will say. They are up to the old tricks.

This is the party that is getting on and building more homes. We want to see people get into more rentals, we want to see prices that are affordable, and that includes building more homes. What I would say to the Greens party is: get out of the way. Stop blocking our ability to build more homes here in this state. People want more homes. They need to be able to afford to rent. I have spent many years in this state as a renter. Here in this place – and I have said that those opposite hardly ever attend sittings here in this place – they have never talked about what life is like for themselves as renters. I have stood here time and time again, by the way, talking about what life is like for a renter. Renters know that we need to build more homes. That enables us to get into rentals and be able to afford rentals. 150 significant rental reforms have come through this place by this government alone in the past almost 12 years – significant rental reforms. That has not just happened by chance, and it certainly has not happened because the Greens over there have attended Parliament. It has happened because Labor has been out on the hustings talking to people and talking to renters. This side of the house is full of people who do rent.

This is just another ploy, another election pitch, and I am sure it will go up on social media as the election pitch for the member for Richmond. I would say she is in trouble. Indeed she is in trouble; we on this side of the house know that. People in this state are waking up and seeing the Greens party for what they really are. I have no doubt that at some stage this week, if they ever get out of the tram tracks of Melbourne, they will get under the West Gate Tunnel on Footscray Road and notice the veloway. And do you know what colour the veloway is? Come on, people – it is green. With this kind of party politics I am convinced that the Greens party will say that the veloway was their idea and therefore that is why it is green. This is the mentality of those opposite. This is the mentality of that party. I wholeheartedly oppose the introduction of this bill.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:00): I am supporting today's introduction of the Greens Residential Tenancies Amendment (Rent Controls) Bill 2026. The Greens believe every Victorian has a right to a stable home. But for too many Victorian renters, their anxiety about becoming homeless due to rising rents is real. Australia is becoming an increasingly unequal country, and that is because we tax income but barely tax wealth at all. As house prices and rents soar, property investors are flourishing while renters struggle to make ends meet. This is trickle-up economics. We need to introduce the Greens rent control bill today, because successive governments have created a system that punches down on renters and allows landlords to hike rents far beyond what is affordable. Sure, renters can appeal those rent increases to VCAT, but if their proposed increase is on a par with similar properties in the area, it is unlikely that they have got a chance. For example, in my electorate of Brunswick, where almost half of all residents rent, the median rent has increased over 7 per cent in the last year, but average incomes only went up by 3.5 per cent. Using similar properties in your area as the yardstick for what is reasonable when rents are racing ahead of income is just, well, unreasonable.

It is curious that the government has a razor-sharp focus on price gouging at the bowser right now – and so they should because that affects almost all of us – but no such focus on landlords price gouging renters, because that is just a problem for what they might regard as the tenant underclass. Our current unfair system does not just make renting unaffordable, it makes home ownership a fantasy. When there is nothing left over after rent, Victorian renters simply cannot save for a deposit. We need to introduce this bill today because of the pain that rising rents are inflicting on Victorian renters from all walks of life.

At my office I have had a parent who is an architect and academic contact us because they could not secure a rental. We have spoken with artists forced out of share houses because a landlord decided to extract whatever the market would bear. We have heard from a single mother with an immaculate rental record who was turned away from rentals again and again. A recent ACOSS survey found that half of renters had already gone without food or medicine to pay their energy bills. There are zero properties in all of Victoria considered affordable for a single person on a Centrelink benefit – zero.

Every year a landlord raises rent above wages is another year that wealth is transferred from those with less to those with more. This is like the Robin Hood story where the Sheriff of Nottingham wins.

But in this house we have the power to put an end to rent gouging. This bill, if introduced today, will freeze rents for two years. This is the urgent relief that renters desperately need in this cost-of-living crisis. Then after the two-year rent freeze, future increases will be capped at whichever is lower, wage growth or inflation, not whatever a landlord decides on a Tuesday morning after their agents called them to suggest that they could extract more from their tenants. We need this bill because rents must reflect what people earn and what things cost. Renters deserve the stability to plan, to budget and perhaps to save for a home of their own, to live without their entire lives consumed by rising housing costs and the fear of homelessness.

I am proud of what the Greens and community advocates have achieved for renters this term. We pushed for, and the government legislated, bans on no-grounds evictions, on rental bidding and on dodgy third-party application fees. By the same method, we have obtained standardised lease forms, a portable bond scheme, extended 90-day notice periods, mandatory heating and cooling and real energy efficiency measures. Our work on an empty homes tax and negotiations with the government to obtain Airbnb regulation have helped stabilise rental costs more here than in other Australian city, and now the Greens want to make rent controls a reality too. We want to advocate for them so that the government legislates them and then blames us for claiming credit. The Greens vision for affordable housing goes further than this bill alone, however. We want a genuine expansion of public and community housing for the more than 100,000 people on the waiting list, but today, this bill is a step forward in the right direction towards fairness for renters.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:05): I rise to oppose the procedural motion by the member for Richmond, and I do so predominantly on the grounds that we all know that the best way to advance good public policy within this place is to work closely with ministers and the government to bring a coordinated and comprehensive set of rental reforms to this place, as this government has been doing. I genuinely think that even the Greens members of this place would recognise that the ministers that we have had – certainly the current Minister for Consumer Affairs and particularly if I can give credit to the Minister for Public and Active Transport when she was formerly in this role – not only have been very active and reforming ministers but have been very open to listening, certainly to issues that I have brought to them on behalf of renters and I know to many issues that my colleagues have brought. I know this directly from my own experience working with the ministers on the issue of rental applications, which many of us know for a long time were ludicrous in the sorts of things that they would ask you for, the sort of data that was clearly being harvested and the very genuine and important questions about where that data was going when you were filling out 15 different references and when you were being asked the names of your pets – all these extraordinary things that real estate agents and landlords were putting in applications. I know that is an issue we talked about three or four years ago now. I think, to give credit, it was an issue raised by the Victorian Socialists and Jordan van den Lamb and an issue that the minister has taken action on. In fact I was absolutely thrilled to see, as other members would have been thrilled to see, that the new standard rental application was released I think just earlier this week. Certainly I saw a copy of it. We will be sharing it around our electorate because that is good news for renters. I just give that as an example of the way in which our ministers have worked with all of us within this chamber, have worked with renters and have certainly worked with the tenants union, or Tenants Victoria, I should say, as they are now called.

In fact I think we had a good example of it in the chamber yesterday, when the member for Brunswick raised an issue related to this practice that some of us have seen where a property has been advertised at a very low price, a sort of bait-and-switch-style strategy, and then built into the agreement is a jump in the rent that occurs around three months or four months later. That is something I think that all of us look at and think does look like a concerning practice. I am not sure how widespread it is. I will be straight up that no-one in Preston or Reservoir has yet raised it with me. But again, perhaps to give credit where it is due, I did see that the Victorian Socialists had raised that through some of their social

media. The member for Brunswick raised it, and I think the minister in his answer showed, as he always does, his thoughtfulness on these issues. I know I certainly spoke to him about it, but I think also in his answer he set out his thinking on precisely this issue that we have with the bill in front of us today. He talked at some length, as members will remember, about the new powers of Consumer Affairs Victoria and Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, and the way in which they now not only take into account, as members have mentioned earlier in this debate, the market rates of rent but can also look at the scale of a rental increase and how that scale compares to current inflation.

I know members who have helped and supported renters in their electorates will know that a really tragic thing and a tough thing you sometimes see is that someone has had the benefit of a pretty good and cheap rental rate. They have had a property that they might have been renting in Reservoir for only $100 a week or something, which is a good rate. Suddenly they get a new landlord or the property changes hands, and it does jump up by a lot. There is a certain argument that it is only just jumping up to the market rate that others in that street are paying. But we have now introduced these important changes to minimise that shock and to really do exactly what it is that I think the Greens bill is intending to do. I will not repeat here in this chamber everything the minister went through but just refer the Greens back to his comments and his way of talking about this. I think it is important to remember that whilst there are different approaches – the Greens have talked about, I think, 16 countries that do this, and I have had a look at some of those ways in which it is done, and they do vary a lot – in some of those countries it is a rental cap of no more than a 20 or 30 per cent increase in a year, the sort of thing that I think would be captured by existing Victorian legislation. I am not sure if the Greens have put a number on it or the member for Richmond has a number on what sort of cap you would put on the annual increase.

A member interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: Well, the wage price index. These are the discussions I would encourage the Greens to have with the minister. I will return, if I can, to my central point, which is that our ministers have been really open to these discussions. The minister only yesterday was setting out exactly his thinking on this particular issue and his track record. I do not have time left here, but all of those issues that he mentioned yesterday about the work that we have done with evictions and to support renters and make Victoria the fairest place to rent are reasons why we should work through him.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:10): As we support the right of all members to introduce matters into the chamber, I seek leave to speak.

Leave refused.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (31): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (48): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Notice given.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Supporting the Transition from Native Timber Harvesting – Ordered to be published

Municipal Association of Victoria – Report 2024–25

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Banyule – GC270

Bayside – GC270

Boroondara – GC270

Darebin – GC270

Glen Eira – GC270

Maribyrnong – GC270

Merri-bek – GC270

Monash – GC270

Stonnington – GC270

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 17.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026

Council's agreement

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:17): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026 without amendment.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (10:18): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended on 5, 12 and 13 May 2026 to allow:

(1) The house to meet at 9:30 am on Tuesday 12 May.

(2) The order of business to be:

Tuesday 5 May
Question time and constituency questions
Formal business
Statements by members
Government business

Tuesday 12 May
Formal business
Statements by members
Statements on committee reports

Government business
Question time and constituency questions (2 pm)
Government business continued
Matter of public importance (4 pm)
Government business continued

Wednesday 13 May
Formal business
Statements by members
Government business
Question time and constituency questions (2 pm)
Government business continued

(3) In relation to the matter of public importance:

(a) at 4 pm on Tuesday 12 May, unless a division is taking place, the Chair interrupts the business before the house and the bells are then rung for 1 minute;

(b) if a division is taking place at 4 pm:

(i) it will be completed without interruption and the result announced;

(ii) if the division is on a closure motion, and the motion is agreed to, the question or questions then required to be put to close the issue before the house will also be dealt with;

(iii) business is then interrupted following the procedure in subparagraph (a);

(c) the Chair announces the matter of public importance;

(d) any business under discussion and not completed at the interruption will be resumed immediately at the end of the matter of public importance, and any member speaking at the time of the interruption may then continue their speech.

(4) The Speaker to interrupt business under sessional order 2 at 5 pm on Wednesday 13 May.

Motion agreed to.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I move, by leave:

That:

(1) So much of standing and sessional orders be suspended so as to allow on Tuesday 5 May 2026, following the introduction and motion for the second reading of the annual appropriation bill:

(a) the minister moving the second reading to retain their right to speak (for 15 minutes) on the question later in the debate;

(b) the Honourable Jaclyn Symes MLC, Treasurer, under section 52 of the Constitution Act 1975, be permitted to attend the house for the purpose of giving a speech of unlimited duration in relation to the annual appropriation bill.

(2) A message be sent to the Legislative Council informing them that, under section 52 of the Constitution Act 1975, approval has been granted for the Honourable Jaclyn Symes MLC, Treasurer, to attend the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday 5 May 2026 to give a speech on the annual appropriation bill.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Motions by leave

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:21): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier, who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it the most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:21): I move, by leave:

That this house notes John Howard had the strength to put Pauline Hanson last while the Leader of the Opposition is too powerless to even say Pauline Hanson is wrong.

Leave refused.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:21): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that Victoria's public school staff are among the lowest paid in the nation and are being driven out of the profession by unsustainable workloads and chronic understaffing and that a recent survey showed that only about a third plan to keep working in public schools and that last week more than 35,000 teachers and support staff walked off the job and rallied on the steps of this Parliament, a rebuke of the Allan Labor government's refusal to make a fair pay offer.

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:22): I move, by leave:

That this house:

(1) condemns the Leader of the Opposition for showing less courage in standing up to Pauline Hanson than former Liberal leaders, who publicly rejected her politics; and

(2) calls out the opposition leader for overseeing a shambolic preselection process within her own party, highlighting that she is not fit to lead the Liberals and not fit to run the state.

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:22): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ripon for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:23): I move, by leave:

That this house notes even Liberal leaders of the past had the backbone to call out Pauline Hanson and condemns the Leader of the Opposition for continuing to remain silent on One Nation, racist rhetoric and reckless economic policy.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:23): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Niddrie for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses need it the most and now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:23): I move, by leave:

That this house notes John Howard drew a line against Pauline Hanson and condemns the Leader of the Opposition for failing a basic leadership test by refusing to do the same.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (10:23): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Narre Warren South for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol prices for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:24): I move, by leave:

That this house notes Malcolm Turnbull publicly rebuked Pauline Hanson and condemns the Leader of the Opposition for lacking the conviction to show the same leadership.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:24): I move, by leave:

This house condemns the member for Monbulk for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in the fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:24): I move, by leave:

That this house notes Peter Dutton was prepared to reject Pauline Hanson's inflammatory comments and condemns the Leader of the Opposition for being too weak to follow even that example.

Leave refused.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:25): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for South Barwon for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:25): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Liberal Party has fallen from John Howard rejecting Pauline Hanson to the Leader of the Opposition refusing to condemn her, revealing how far the modern Liberals have sunk.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:25): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Yan Yean for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:26): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for her cowardly refusal to call out Pauline Hanson and One Nation and notes that silence in the face of extremism is complicity.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:26): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Melton for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:26): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Leader of the Opposition to choose: stand with past Liberal leaders who rejected Pauline Hanson or stand with Pauline Hanson herself.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:27): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bellarine for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses need it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol to Victorians.

Leave refused.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:27): I move, by leave:

That this house notes formal Liberal leaders found the moral authority to reject Pauline Hanson and condemns the current Leader of the Opposition for her glaring lack of principle.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:27): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for reflecting upon the service record of former Victorian policepersons.

Leave refused.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:27): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition as too weak to lead her party if she cannot even bring herself to denounce Pauline Hanson and One Nation.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:27): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eureka for backing the Premier, who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:28): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Wendouree for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper fuel for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:28): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Werribee for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (10:29): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Sunbury for backing a Premier who failed to fight for a reduction in fuel excise when Victorian families and businesses needed it most and who now wants to hoard GST rather than deliver cheaper petrol for Victorians.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:29): General business, notices of motion 71 and 86 and order of the day 4, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Members statements

Fuel supply and prices

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:30): Across regional Victoria, families, businesses and farmers are being pushed to the brink. They work hard, they pay their taxes and they keep the state running, yet they are the first to be hit and the last to be helped by a city-centric Labor government. Fuel shortages are no longer a risk; they are a reality, and when fuel runs short in the regions everything stops. Tractors do not run, feed cannot be mixed, crops are not sown let alone harvested and freight does not move. Even our sponsorship to our local service clubs and sporting clubs is drying up. This is not just an inconvenience; it is a direct threat to food production, animal welfare and the livelihoods of hardworking Victorians.

At the same time, the cost of living is soaring. Regional families are paying more at the bowser, more at the supermarket and more just to keep the lights on while their incomes are stretched thinner every day. And what are they getting in return? Uncertainty, delays and a Labor government that is more focused on when it will replace the current Premier than on supporting regional Victorians that are facing a fuel and cost-of-living crisis. Our farmers need certainty that fuel will be available when they need it most. This does not just mean fuel supplies for April but certainty that there will be fuel available for spraying, spreading fertiliser – if that is even available – right through to harvest. Our communities need real, practical support to deal with the rising costs, not just free transport in Melbourne rather than regional Victoria, where we do not have access to public transport. Regional Victorians want a fair go, and it is time that Labor stood up for them.

Ripon electorate sports facilities

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:31): It has been an extraordinary fortnight for community sport right across Ripon. On 21 March the Maryborough community came together to celebrate five brand-new synthetic tennis courts in the heart of town. Around 60 junior players were the first to take to the courts, and the smiles on their faces said it all. I am so proud to have helped deliver this outcome for local kids and families, made possible thanks to $400,000 from the state Labor government. A huge thankyou to the Maryborough Tennis Centre and especially Heather and Brian Carr, whose tireless advocacy helped bring this project to life.

Last Thursday night I was also honoured to officially open the upgraded pavilion, change rooms, umpire facilities and social space at the Navarre Recreation Reserve. This project was backed by $600,000 from our government, alongside major contributions from Northern Grampians Shire Council and Navarre Sports Association. It shows what can be done when community and government work together. I want to acknowledge everyone who helped make it happen, including Barry Fletcher, Chris Bibby, Trish Martin, Lisa Hannett, Luke Martin, Tegan McKenny and the dedicated Northern Grampians shire team including Tony Dark, Michelle Anderson, Kandee Bala and Shane Chipperfield. Thanks to their hard work Navarre now has the modern sporting hub it deserves. Across our region we are making real progress transforming sports infrastructure for our country communities. There is always more to do, but I am so proud of what we are delivering for Ripon.

Eildon electorate primary schools

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:33): I took great delight watching Healesville Primary School's colour run on Friday last week. I could hear the excitement of the day before I could see it. The entire school was having a ball as students navigated tyres and streamers and coloured bursts. Prep students got in the swing quickly and did not stop running, and it was hard to know who was having the most fun – the students, the teachers or the parents, or maybe it was principal Tracey Robertson-Smith, dressed up as a big clown. The colour run is a key fundraising activity for the school, with proceeds this year going to a new bike shed and sports equipment. Congratulations again to students Penny Freeman and Sienna Hamilton for their inspiring fundraising efforts.

Flowerdale Primary School is a small school with a big heart. On Saturday students joined staff and parents to put on a big fair, and it was a ripper. There was so much activity. I loved – but did not participate in – rollerskating on the covered court. There was African drumming, face painting, a petting zoo, bubbles and stallholders. The egg and bacon roll really hit the spot. Congratulations to Sarah Hopkins for her role in driving the event.

Government performance

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:34): The lack of transparency and accountability by this Labor government knows no bounds and should be condemned. Shockingly, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and their team are happy to turn a blind eye to the largest corruption scandal in Victoria's history – $15 billion of rorts. They are happy to turn a blind eye to strippers, crime syndicates and bikie gangs on government construction sites, and they refuse to give follow-the-money powers to IBAC.

Trans Day of Visibility

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:34): Trans Day of Visibility offers a chance to see and recognise the courage, resilience and joy of transgender and gender-diverse people in our community. In Victoria, we are proud of the meaningful steps our state government has taken to support the LGBTIQA+ community. From our *Pride in Our Future* strategy, the strengthening of anti-vilification laws, supporting Pride events and sector strengthening to reforms allowing people to update their legal gender, we lead the nation in compassion, kindness and respect. But legislation alone is not enough. True inclusion is reflected in how we treat each other every day. It lives in the words we choose, the spaces we create and the dignity we extend to every person we meet. Visibility matters, because when people feel seen, they know they belong.

Nillumbik Chinese Seniors Association

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:35): The Nillumbik Chinese Seniors Association are just awesome, as was their Lunar New Year celebration. It was a vibrant and joyful event, and locals came together in celebration of rich cultural traditions, with stunning performances, incredible food and a spirit of warmth and inclusion felt by everyone in the room. It was wonderful to see the pride and care with which the association creates opportunities for connection, enabling a cultural heritage celebration that is shared across generations. Events like these showcase many longstanding traditions, as well as strengthening the sense of belonging within our diverse community. I encourage locals to think about joining the Nillumbik Chinese senior citizens association and taking part in their many activities and future celebrations. Their welcome is genuine, the experiences are memorable and the sense of community is truly special.

Community volunteers

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:36): Congratulations to the many community members who received much-deserved recognition from Kate Thwaites MP for their community volunteering.

Victoria Police

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (10:36): Yesterday the Premier used Parliament again to attempt to degrade my service as a Victoria Police officer. The claim was that two years of service amounts to nothing. It was insulting, not to me but to the many police officers who have reached out afterwards. My years of service are irrelevant. What matters is what can happen in two years of wearing the Victoria Police uniform. It was my dream to join the police. My uncle Tony and my aunty Michelle served proudly as coppers. At school I researched the tragic events of Walsh Street in 1988, when constables Steven Tynan and Damian Eyre gave their lives protecting the community. They were 22

and 20 years old respectively. They had served two years and nine months and only six months. This is what can happen in two years. Last week the police and community members gathered to honour Angela Rose Taylor, killed at 21 in the Russell Street bombing, only two years into her career. She was the first female officer killed in the line of duty. Premier, the list goes on: Constable Humphris, Constable Prestney and many others gave their lives protecting the community, and some within the first two years. There is also the silent list: members who leave after weeks, months or a couple of years because of what they have seen. Premier, I will forgive you once for degrading my opportunity to be a police officer in Victoria and maybe twice, but three times is a habit, and it has to stop.

Ashwood electorate schools

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:37): Members may remember in 1987 – I know I do – there was a little band called the Breakfast Club that had a single called *Right on Track*, and I can tell members –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Environment will leave the chamber for an hour.

Minister for Environment withdrew from chamber.

Matt FREGON: that our Victorian school breakfast club program is right on track, and unlike the song from 1987, it is not a one-hit wonder. We have done 65 million breakfasts in this state. The Deputy Premier met with me at Mount Waverley secondary school to meet the wonderful kids down there. It showed just how good the work that Foodbank is doing is to provide breakfasts for our students in the morning. We know that a day starts much better for education when it is on a full stomach, so I commend all of the people – the teachers, the principals, Foodbank, everyone – involved in this fantastic program.

We have also had a lot of school leadership badges. We have had prep bags. A big shout-out to the wonderful kids down at Essex Heights Primary, Mount Waverley North Primary, Ashwood School, Syndal South Primary, Camberwell South Primary – they have got some new toilets coming by the way, which was a fantastic little thing with the Deputy Premier – and Pinewood Primary, whose gym, which we committed to in 2022, is coming up a treat, and we will be ready to see it in August. I have got to tell you, the work that that school is doing is exemplary. I am going to run out of time again. I will see you next week.

Minister for Disability

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:39): I want to respond to comments made by the Minister for Disability, who said last week that I seemingly prefer to leave children and people with a disability at the mercy of predators. As the father of a disabled child and someone who gave many hours of work as a disability advocate before being elected, that is genuinely a horrible thing to say. While I have learned to dismiss criticism from fools, she also unfairly criticised Julie Phillips from the Disability Discrimination Legal Service, the Health and Community Services Union and the Mental Health Legal Centre. Why? Because we opposed her flawed bill. She should have also included every crossbench MP and more than 40 disability organisations that opposed it. Yesterday I received a letter from eight of those entities who believe they were implicated by her childish comments calling for an apology. This included Labor Enabled, members of her own party living with a disability, asking for an apology. The video of Ms Blandthorn's speech is now circulating widely across the disability sector. Never have I seen a disability minister more disliked by such a large cohort of the people she is meant to represent. It was her own extraordinary level of incompetence that led to this issue. Even some of her own colleagues have acknowledged that to me. She should apologise to all those workers and people with a disability she offended with her disgraceful and petulant comments.

Bellarine electorate bus services

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:40): We are just about halfway through our Bellarine bus review engagement. I want to sincerely thank those who have done the survey either online or in person. Today I want to make a special mention of a young person who has reminded me exactly why we do this work. Indy Johnson at Bellarine Secondary College is a student who spent a day with me doing work experience, and in that short time she made a real impact. Indy helped me design a student-focused survey for the bus review, bringing incredible insight into how to ask the right questions of her peers – questions to understand how young people are using the service and want to improve our bus network. But she did not stop there: Indy then took the survey back to her school and actively encouraged other students to have their say, and that is why this is really important. Young people using transport – their experiences, their challenges and their ideas – really matter. I want to thank Indy for showing leadership, initiative and a deep commitment to her community, and I thank every young person across the Bellarine. Your voice really matters.

Bellarine electorate events

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:41): It has been also a very busy and vibrant time on the Bellarine. I attended the One Planet Festival in Ocean Grove, hosted by the Bellarine Parents for Climate, offering a day of inspiration and conversation. I popped into the North Bellarine Arts Trail, showcasing amazing local talented artists. Leopold Primary School and the Bendigo Bank hosted the Leopold Kids Day Out, a fun family day raising of funds for the Good Friday Appeal. It is so wonderful to see the Bellarine community come together to celebrate and support our local events, and I want to wish everyone a happy Easter.

Gardenvale Primary School

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:42): Last week the local community gathered for the Gardenvale Primary School walkathon, a fantastic cause to raise funds for new picnic chairs and tables for the junior campus and basketball hoops at the senior campus. The walkathon was a huge hit with children, who had a lot of fun. Thank you to the parent association for their support, and special thanks to principal Janine Hall for her wonderful leadership.

Brighton Classic Car Show

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:42): With the sun in the sky in Bayside, I enjoyed visiting the fifth Brighton Classic Car Show hosted by the Rotary Club of Brighton. With almost 150 cars on show, there was something for everyone. But it was the classic Fiat 500 that caught the member for Goldstein's eye, where he chose for both of us to be interviewed together by local media.

Smith Family

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:43): The Smith Family recently held a workshop in Brighton to provide practical education about key financial safety topics. Partnering with ANZ, it was the fifth workshop they have delivered to the Australian community. In 2025 there were reported losses of $334 million to scams across Australians, with over 200,000 scams reported. Anyone can be scammed. Thank you to the organisations for running the workshop.

Dendy Park Tennis Club

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:43): Bayside is excited that Tennis Australia has partnered with South Yarra and Dendy Park tennis clubs to see a major $3.5 million upgrade to Dendy Park facilities in Brighton East. Stage 1 works are underway, with the clubhouse and 12 courts upgraded. The next stage will include further upgrades and the installation of new padel courts. Thank you to all involved, including club president Tim O'Shannassy. Sadly, there was not a dollar of state Labor government funding.

Geelong Foodshare

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:44): Last week I joined the celebration for the opening of the Mercer Street social supermarket and education kitchen, one of Geelong Foodshare's flagship services. Every Geelong family deserves to know where their next meal is coming from. The Mercer Street social supermarket is showing what that looks like in practice. I want to acknowledge and thank the CEO Andrew Schauble, the team and the board members for the incredible work they are doing across the Geelong region. In particular I want to acknowledge and thank the awesome volunteers for the commitment and passion that they have put into Geelong Foodshare every single day. Mercer Street lets customers choose groceries in a welcoming supermarket-style environment with respect and dignity. With extended hours, including late nights, busy families and individuals can access support when they need it. Culturally appropriate food options reflect Geelong's diverse communities. An onsite kitchen will deliver education to help families build skills, confidence and long-term food security. The social supermarket model also helps tackle food waste by redirecting surplus food into the community. The strength in Geelong's ability to collaborate and support each other is evidenced in the support given to the Mercer Street social supermarket by many across our community. A great example is that the chefs from the Nyaal Banyul conference and exhibition centre will assist in the cooking classes. I am proud to back Geelong Foodshare.

Iranian community

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:45): I rise today to wish the Iranian community a very happy Nowruz Pirouz. Nowruz marks the triumph of light over darkness, renewal, hope and a promise of a better future. This year, this meaning carries even greater weight as brave Iranians continue to stand against oppression and fight for freedom. The electorate of Warrandyte is home to one of the largest Iranian communities in Australia, and it is a community defined by resilience, work ethic and a deep belief in freedom. We know that Iranian Australians have unfortunately faced intimidation, threats and harassment linked to the regime they fled here in Australia. Recently in Doncaster East a local business was targeted. Shahrzad Shirkhanzadeh's restaurant in my electorate was vandalised, with flags torn down and windows smashed. On the same night, her father's car was attacked and he was told 'Go back to your country' because they dared to speak out against the ayatollah's regime. Shahrzad said, 'We did not come to Australia to live in fear again.' That should stop every one of us in our tracks, because if people who have fled oppression cannot speak freely here, then something has gone very wrong. We stand with Shahrzad, we stand with those who speak out and we continue to stand with the courageous Iranian community here in Australia.

Easter

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:46): I congratulate all of the children that entered my Easter colouring competition. Well done to each and every one of them, and a big congratulations to Liyon from Donvale Preschool, Amanda from Tunstall Square kinder, Shannon from Donvale, and Patty, Ivy, Mila and Olivia.

Outer East Foodshare

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:47): I just want to give a huge shout-out and thank all of the wonderful volunteers at Outer East Foodshare based at Templeton Reserve in Wantirna. There are over 80 volunteers and they act as a bit of a mini regional food bank for our part of the world. They support a whole range of charities and not-for-profit organisations to get food right across the area to those who need it most. I was proud that the state government was able to provide them with a grant to help them with a new large freezer, and I was very glad that when I jumped in there to get a photo, I was not locked in. I know politicians are not always the most popular people, so I thank the crew, Marilyn and the team for not doing that to me. It was very cold, so it is doing its work and making a huge difference there.

Knox Infolink

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:47): I would also like to say a huge thankyou to Knox Infolink – to Penny, to Denise and to the team down there running the breakfast program. But it is not just the breakfast program, they are doing so much to help people in need, whether it is referrals to crisis services, whether it is getting a good meal into them, whether it is activities or whether it is getting them a haircut or a vaccination. The team at Knox Infolink are absolutely next level, and I am very grateful to have them based in the heart of Knox in Boronia.

Good Friday Appeal

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:48): I also want to give a huge shout-out to the kids and staff at Wantirna College, who are right now walking and running 50 kilometres to raise funds for the Good Friday Appeal. Their target is $100,000 and they have raised about $70,000 to date. They have done this for a number of years now. They should be incredibly proud.

Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:48): I also just want to say a huge thankyou to the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club for making me their number one supporter. I was absolutely chuffed. Well done to Wayne Preston for being number two.

Residential tenancies

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:48): Moving home is one of the most stressful experiences that someone can experience, and right now, if you are in Victoria, landlords can evict you if they want to sell their property. They can give notice to vacate at the end of a fixed term or at any time during a periodic agreement. Many renters have faced having to move because of this – like Joanne, a high-earning executive and a single mum who always paid her rent on time. She was given a notice to vacate when her landlord wanted to sell. What followed afterwards were 38 inspections, over 11 rental applications, rehoming pets and being hospitalised twice for stress. At VCAT she was even told to prepare her kids for foster care after her eviction was upheld, despite questioning whether the sale actually needed vacant possession. Luckily, at the last minute she secured a lease. But if this can happen to Joanne earning over $200,000 a year, imagine what others are facing. Many hunt for another rental, scrounge money for a new bond, pack up their lives and move out, only then to see their previous home being relisted as a rental. It just does not make sense. Unless the buyer is an owner-occupier who will move in straight after the sale, if a landlord sells, it should be with a tenancy intact like it is in many other jurisdictions around the world, because renting should be secure and fair and everyone deserves a secure, affordable home.

Daylesford College

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:50): I rise today to celebrate a fantastic outcome for the Ballan community, one that has been years in the making. The recent announcement of new school zoning arrangements will see the town of Ballan now zoned Daylesford College. This is a change that local families have strongly advocated for and one that reflects the real connections and needs of our community. For several years parents in Ballan have raised with me the challenges that they have faced under previous zoning arrangements. They have spoken about travel, about community ties and about wanting their children to attend a school that better reflects where they live and how they live. I was very pleased to stand with them in that advocacy, including presenting a petition to the Minister for Education calling for this change, and today we see the result of that advocacy. I want to sincerely thank the Minister for Education for listening to the voices of Ballan parents and recognising the importance of getting school zoning right for regional communities. I thank the Daylesford school council and principal for their advocacy, and I also thank their wonderful local member the member for Macedon for her advocacy for this amazing change. This is a great example of community voices being heard and acted upon. To the families of Ballan: this outcome belongs to you.

Container deposit scheme

David HODGETT (Croydon) (10:51): I rise to speak on the government's container deposit scheme and to highlight concerns that have been raised with me regarding the effectiveness of the program within the Croydon district and surrounding suburbs. I have received numerous reports from residents who participate in the scheme and seek to redeem the 10-cent refund on eligible containers only to be advised upon arrival that refund machines are full and unable to accept any further items. This raises serious questions about whether service providers are adequately maintaining and servicing refund points in Melbourne's outer-eastern suburbs. A scheme designed to encourage recycling cannot achieve its intended purpose if residents are routinely turned away due to capacity issues. The government must review the operation of the program to ensure fairness and accessibility and to guarantee that all Victorians who wish to participate are able to do so and receive the refunds to which they are entitled.

George McDonald

David HODGETT (Croydon) (10:52): On a separate note, I would like to acknowledge a local legend, George McDonald OAM, who recently turned 94. George has been a stalwart of the Mooroolbark and Kilsyth communities for over 50 years and was the driving force in establishing the courts at Pinks Reserve, Kilsyth, which are used by the Mountain District Badminton Association. He is still an active member of the community and still volunteers with local projects, such as the Celebrate Mooroolbark festival and the Shop 16 community initiative in Mooroolbark, which provides food for struggling families. Happy birthday, George, and thank you for all that you have done for our community.

Northcote electorate events

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:53): Northcote has incredible community spirit. School fetes have been buzzing at Bell, Northcote and Wales Street primaries thanks to the immense effort of our school communities. At St Mary's primary Ride2School Day had kids learning lifelong healthy habits. Big thanks to principal Mary Kearney for inviting me along. Last Saturday, in the rain, dozens of families joined our annual Easter egg hunt in All Nations Park, which I host with Ged Kearney. It was wet and fun, and the kids had a ball as we raised funds for the Good Friday Appeal.

On High Street I joined local traders to announce a $55,000 grant to transform graffiti hotspots into vibrant artworks telling our multicultural stories. I was proud to stand with our Hellenic community at the Shrine of Remembrance to mark Greek Independence Day, a powerful tribute to those who fought for democracy and freedom. It was moving to see Alphington Grammar, St John's College and local community groups marching with pride. At the Cypriot halloumi festival, thousands turned out to taste, cook and celebrate this iconic staple of Cyprus and a favourite in Melbourne.

It was also a delight to host our first Northcote bowls tournament here at Parliament, with Fairfield, Alphington and Thornbury bowls clubs coming together. Cheers to Thornbury Bowls for the win. At North Alphington Cricket Club's presentation night we celebrated a season of teamwork and pride. Congratulations to the under-12 and under-14 teams on their premierships. There is more to come for local sport too, with upgrades on the way at Pitcher Park. And just this Sunday I visited Circus Nexus to announce a $400,000 grant to back their incredible work creating inclusive communities and opportunities in circus arts.

Box Hill youth advisory council

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:54): I would like to give a shout-out to each member of the 2025–26 Box Hill youth advisory council: Adam Chidgey, Amelie Long, Amiya Cameron, Anika Jacob, Ashleigh Yee, Ben Harding, Elise Ho, Isabella Cidoni, Marcus Spaul, Mary-Jane Zhang, Molly Doyle, Riley Yeo, Sam Bendeich and Tarana Kaur. Thank you for all of your tireless work over the last few months and for making your voices heard on behalf of young Victorians across the state and

particularly across the Box Hill electorate. I hope your passion for policy and advocacy continues beyond the end of the youth council.

Felicitations

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:55): I would like to take a moment to wish everybody across the Box Hill electorate a very happy and safe Easter. I encourage everyone to take care on the roads and look out for one another over this long weekend. Thank you to our emergency services workers and everybody who will be working across this long weekend to make our community safe.

Cultural Diversity Week

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:55): I rise to acknowledge that last week we celebrated Cultural Diversity Week and the extraordinary diversity of the Melton electorate. It reminds us that culture does not divide us, it connects us, and in Melton we see that lived out every single day. Across our community people from all corners of the world have made Melton home. They bring with them language, food, faith, music and traditions, but more importantly, they bring a spirit of generosity and inclusion that strengthens our whole community. We see it in the many different cultural festivals and celebrations held right across Melton, events that are not closed off and exclusive but open – open to neighbours, open to newcomers and open to anyone who wants to learn, share and be part of something bigger. What stands out in Melton is this: our multicultural communities do not just celebrate their own cultures, they actively welcome others into them. They cook for each other, support each other and show up for each other. That is what real community looks like. While there are always voices – often loud and sometimes from behind a screen – that try to tell a different story about diversity, in Melton we know the truth. We see the reality, and we live it. We see that diversity is not something to fear, it is something to be proud of.

Assyrian New Year

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:57): Last Sunday it was a privilege to join thousands of Assyrian Victorians in Craigieburn to celebrate Kha b-Nisan, Assyrian New Year 6776. It was a powerful expression of family, faith, culture and history. The Premier's attendance marked an historic first, and her announcement of a $10 million investment towards St Joseph's Christian college was a truly significant moment. It brings Victoria's first Assyrian school much closer to reality, and only Labor is financially committed to delivering Victoria's first Assyrian school. I thank the Premier, the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and my local colleagues Minister Erdogan, Minister Spence and the member for Broadmeadows for their joint commitment to this important project. We stand firmly behind the St Joseph's project, as we always have, and this $10 million commitment brings it so much closer. It matters for Assyrian families across Victoria, and it stands as a symbol of our collective commitment as the Victorian Labor government to religious freedom and to ensuring that Assyrian language, culture and faith thrive in our state for generations to come. I thank His Grace Mar Benyamin Elya for his steadfast leadership, partnership and resilience. St Joseph's will be more than a school; it will stand as a pillar of identity, preserving language, faith and culture for future generations. Above all, it represents our commitment to multicultural and faith communities in Melbourne's north and ensures a strong future for the Assyrian community in Greenvale.

Felicitations

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:58): I take this opportunity to wish all of my constituents celebrating this weekend a very happy Easter and a happy and blessed Holy Week, following so soon after Eid and Nowruz.

Cultural Diversity Week

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:58): I would like to give a huge shout-out to AVWA, the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, and their CEO Nicky Chung. I recently attended their Cultural Diversity Week event at the Immigration Museum. It says a lot about an organisation that it

can get the Immigration Museum to co-host such an event and have the Prime Minister attend. The event explored the stories of Vietnamese Australians and showcased beautiful multicultural performances. It was a great opportunity to reflect on the challenges the Vietnamese community have faced in the past, their perseverance and resilience through these challenges and the themes that bring us all together across cultural backgrounds.

I had the honour of representing the Minister for Multicultural Affairs at the Ugadi celebrations hosted by the Melbourne Kannada Sangha. The Ugadi festival signifies new beginnings and the creation of the universe by Lord Brahma. It was another display of our wonderful multiculturalism.

Felicitations

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:59): I would also like to wish everybody in the Mulgrave electorate a happy Easter for this weekend. I hosted a community barbecue and Easter egg hunt just on Saturday at Burden Park in Springvale. While the rain did not stop us, it did try to hold us back. But it was a great day for all local families to make new friends and have a chat with them all. I would also like to extend a thankyou to Michael Galea in the other place for helping me on the day as well.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:00): I rise to speak on the report on the 2025–26 budget estimates, which exposes the Allan Labor government for significant flaws in financial management and a failure to execute its fiscal strategy. Key findings of the report outlined in chapter 1, page 4, expose the Allan Labor government for a lack of accountability and transparency relating to information published in the budget and expose Labor's Department of Treasury and Finance for inefficient reporting on financial sustainability. The report reminds Victorians that under Labor, government sector net debt is expected to skyrocket to $194 billion in 2028–29, the highest debt in the nation.

What is curious about this report by a committee dominated by Labor government members are statements about the government's progress on its fiscal strategy, including at findings 3 and 4. The first step of Labor's fiscal strategy was to reduce unemployment, yet this budget outlined that unemployment is rising. The last step of Labor's fiscal strategy was to reduce debt as a proportion of gross state product, yet this budget forecast it to increase to a staggering 25.1 per cent. That is right, debt now makes up a quarter of Victoria's economy under Labor, and this budget forecast that it would remain at 24.9 per cent in 2028–29.

Concerningly, this report does not include the recent history of Labor's fiscal strategy and how Labor conveniently shifted the goalposts. In 2019 Labor promised to stabilise net debt at 12 per cent of gross state product; instead Labor has broken that promise and more than doubled debt as a proportion of GSP, and it is why it is concerning that this report, tabled by a committee dominated by Labor MPs, is trying to tell Victorians that the government is achieving its fiscal strategy when clearly it is not. Changing the strategy to suit bad economic figures is not success, it is failure.

The midyear financial report, released recently, confirms Victoria's dire financial position under 12 years of the Andrews–Allan Labor government, with debt equating to a record $22,700 per person, and –

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am wondering which committee report the member is speaking on and the relevance –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): The report is on the 2025–26 budget estimates, as stated at the outset.

Bridget VALLENCE: Changing the strategy to suit bad economic figures is not success; it is failure, and it is precisely why the Labor members are concerned to hear this in real time. The midyear financial report, released recently, confirms Victoria's dire financial position. And what comes with the debt? An interest bill that must be repaid. Interest to service Labor's debt will increase by $10.6 billion; that equates to $28.9 million a day or $1.2 million an hour. That is money that cannot be spent on meaningful cost-of-living relief or on community safety initiatives to combat the rise in crime, with a crime being committed every 50 seconds now in Victoria under Labor. The interest bill is $29 million a day that cannot be spent on extra police or extra nurses or upgrading hospital emergency departments – like at Maroondah Hospital, which has been promised by Labor at two elections but so far they have failed to deliver – or on new equipment for Lilydale SES or our Yarra Valley and Maroondah group CFA fire brigades or upgrading our local schools.

That interest bill on Labor's debt is over $1 million an hour. That cannot be spent on fixing dangerous, potholed roads like Maroondah Highway and Killara Road, Coldstream; Warburton Highway, Seville East; Hull and Mooroolbark roads in Mooroolbark; or Clegg Road from Wandin to Mount Evelyn. I will always fight in the budget to include funding for our community, and I call on the government in the next budget to upgrade Maroondah Highway and Killara Road, Coldstream, and Warburton Highway in Seville East and the local schools in my community.

Interestingly, the report highlights in chapter 2 on page 15 significant risks to the financial sustainability of Victoria's economy under this Labor government, with finding 4 of the report finding that measures of fiscal sustainability may impact long-term financial sustainability, such as increasing interest expenses as a proportion of revenue. The risks to financial sustainability in Victoria under Labor are real. Quoting the report:

> … there are several emerging risks to the Government's fiscal strategy including:
>
> - growing debt and interest costs
> - rising employee costs
> - increased operating expenses …
> - limited new revenue and income streams
> - unplanned infrastructure cost increases …

like Labor's Big Build infrastructure project, which is embroiled in $15 billion of corruption and crime-gang scandals. As the midyear financial report shows, Victorians will be shocked by Labor recklessly borrowing $12.7 billion more for cost overruns on these corrupt projects.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (11:05): I rise to make a further contribution on the Legislative Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee report on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. That is why I continue to draw the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, the Minister for Public and Active Transport and the Parliament's attention to the 61 findings and 56 recommendations set out in the report to help make our local roads and streets safer and to encourage more public transport take-up. In this respect I draw the house's attention to recommendation 23, that the Department of Transport and Planning prioritise the delivery of accessible tram stops, and also draw the house's attention to an email I received from an elderly lady June in Coburg recently. She said:

> I do not need to tell you that our population is ageing rapidly.
>
> I am 84 years-old & have a fractured spine caused by osteoporosis.
>
> For the last 3 years, this condition, plus a severe scoliosis, has meant decreasing mobility for me & forced me to use a walking frame inside & outside my home.

> Until the fracture, I led a very active life, going to tai chi, an exercise class & … activities each week. I am now unable to attend those physical classes owing to poor balance & the loss of mobility.
>
> I strive to get out every day & as I do not drive, I use public transport whenever I can.
>
> People are very kind & help me. I use trains & buses more easily than trams, as the No 19 tram service –

the one on Sydney Road –

> seems to have 50% of its fleet on non wheelchair-accessible carriages.
>
> It is impossible to get in or out of carriages that have interior steps. The answer, perhaps, would be to have raised platforms in the street at every stop.

I acknowledge her advocacy. That is why I continue to call on the government to prioritise the rollout of accessible tram stops, particularly along Sydney Road's route 19. I acknowledge all those advocates of our community on this issue over the last few years, particularly Christian Astourian and the Sydney Road Accessible Tram Stops campaign; Glenyys Romanes, a former member of this place too, from the Victorian Transport Action Group; and many others who continue to raise the issue, who I listened to and support in this endeavour. I urge the government to pursue that finding as a priority.

Finding 12 is about increasing uptake of public transport through better connectivity, accessibility and service frequency to cut the number of vehicles on the road and provide safer environments for vulnerable road users. Recommendation 3 goes to the Victorian government needing to continue to invest in public transport to make it a more attractive option and ensure public transport stops, interchanges and connections are incorporated into planning. In this respect I welcome the Victorian Labor government's announcement of free public transport for all of April in response to the rising fuel prices and fuel demand as a result of the conflict in the Middle East. We are making public transport free for everyone on all trains, trams and buses – no need for people to tap on or off. Whilst this will not solve everything in the context of the war in the Middle East, it is one of the immediate steps we are taking to help Victorians with the cost of living and rising demand on petrol and petrol prices. This of course builds on our historic free public transport initiatives for youths under 18, saving young people around $750 each, and free public transport for seniors, an initiative we have expanded that will now save seniors around $320 each as well. I particularly want to acknowledge the hardworking members of the RTBU, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, for all the work they do to keep our public transport system going, and of course the Transport Workers' Union members too.

The other initiative that we have made since that recommendation, which goes to the heart of that recommendation as well, is the tap-and-go on public transport trial that we are now undertaking as a first on the Upfield and the Craigieburn lines – which will be suspended for the duration of the free public transport for April, I should add, but will recommence that in due course. From 16 March we began rolling out the tap-and-go technology trial on public transport, which will be available for passengers travelling on full fare where passengers simply can tap on and off with a Mastercard, Visa card, debit card, smartphone or smartwatch. Specific readers and gates used for the trial have been decorated so passengers know exactly which readers to tap on and go to. Once the trials are successfully completed, tap-and-go payments will be switched on across the rest of the rail network before being rolled out on trams and buses as well.

In terms of trains, we are making significant progress there too. Last week I was delighted to join the Minister for Public and Active Transport at the Metro Trains training centre in the CBD to test the full-sized X'Trapolis 2.0 train simulator. Channel Nine covered the story, so you might have caught it, I do not know, but it will be on my YouTube channel if you want to have a look. Around a thousand train drivers have started training on the full-sized X'Trapolis 2.0 train simulator. I had a go of it as well. It has got the actual simulated different routes. I tried it on the Craigieburn line, but I think I will stick to my day job.

Of course the Upfield and the Craigieburn lines are the first lines to be receiving, along with the Frankston line, the new X'Trapolis 2.0 train, once testing is completed. This will mean 10 per cent more train passenger capacity and smoother and more comfortable trips on the most modern of trains

on our network. This of course builds on the ongoing investments we have been making to improve local trains on the Upfield and Craigieburn lines via the new Metro rail tunnel, with the new 20-minute weekend services, down from every 40 minutes, and the new 20-minute weeknight and evening services, down from every 40 minutes, which will be rolled out soon. A new timetable from the middle of the year will be rolled out, but we continue to take action on public transport and road safety.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (11:10): I rise today to speak on the findings of the Victorian Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into securing Victoria's food supply, a critically important issue not just for our state but especially for regional communities like mine in Shepparton. I note my colleague the member for Morwell is the deputy chair. This inquiry highlights what those of us in regional Victoria have known for a long time: food security is not guaranteed. It must be protected, supported and planned for. My electorate of Shepparton is known as the food bowl of Australia, a region that literally feeds the nation as well as producing global exports.

The recommendation on page 16 of the report calls on the Victorian government to develop a whole-of-government Victorian food strategy and recommends that such a strategy must address the food system as a whole, including agriculture, processing, manufacturing, supply and consumption. It should be centred on access to adequate nutritious food and ensuring that there is no threat to that supply. The strategy should aim to secure Victoria's supply of healthy locally grown food in the long term; strengthen the resilience of Victoria's food system to shocks and stresses by promoting diversity across the system, decentralising and localising supply chains; promote regenerative and sustainable food production; support Victorian farmers and food manufacturers to build profitable businesses and expand healthy food production; map major food-processing regions and protect all agricultural land from inappropriate development; and build food systems literacy across government departments and local government.

The committee found that Victoria's agricultural sector is currently grappling with workforce shortages and the advanced ageing of farmers. A strong, skilled agricultural workforce is critical to securing the state's future food supply. The sector is a significant and important source of employment, particularly in regional communities. The strategy must also set measurable targets, clearly attribute responsibility for achieving these targets and include a transparent monitoring framework. This is critical, because right now policy is fragmented. Decisions about land use, infrastructure and water are often made in isolation without fully considering their impact on food production.

A key recommendation of the inquiry I would like to touch on is stronger protection for higher value agricultural land. In regions like the Shepparton electorate we are seeing increasing pressure from development and competing land uses. Once prime agricultural land is lost, it is lost forever. The committee rightly highlighted the need for improved planning protections, clearer identification of strategic agricultural zones and stronger safeguards against inappropriate development. It was noted in the report by many stakeholders and impacted communities that stronger planning controls are needed to protect agricultural land from inappropriate development. This is about protecting not just land but our ability to feed future generations.

I want to talk to this further in relation to my electorate. Recommendation 1 of the committee's final report is around mapping major food-producing regions and the need to protect all agricultural land from inappropriate development. Prime agricultural farmland through Shepparton East to Dookie have now been included in the proposed Central North renewable energy zone by VicGrid. In the original draft planning process these communities were excluded and have now been blindsided by this inclusion. This decision has caused significant uncertainty and anxiety amongst the local community, which has led locals to establish a formal campaign calling for responsible renewable energy planning and the protection of their prime agricultural land.

Another issue in my region is water security. You cannot talk about food production in northern Victoria without talking about water. The inquiry emphasised the importance of secure, reliable and affordable water across farming and agricultural communities. In the Goulburn Valley irrigation is the lifeblood of our agricultural sector, yet farmers continue to face uncertainty around water availability, pricing and policy settings. The committee called for better long-term water planning and greater recognition of the role irrigation plays in food production. Without water security there is no food security.

Another major issue identified in the report is workforce. The inquiry found significant shortages across farmland, food processing, and transport and logistics. This is something we see every day in the Shepparton electorate. The committee recommended expanding training and skills programs, stronger pathways for regional workers and better support to attract and retain workers in regional areas. This aligns with what we have been calling for, including better access to TAFE and training and improved regional transport to connect workers with jobs. This inquiry tells us that securing Victoria's food supply requires leadership, coordination and long-term planning. It requires us to protect our agricultural land, secure our water resources, support our workforce and invest in regional infrastructure. Importantly, it requires us to listen to the regions.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (11:15): It is with great pleasure that I rise today and speak on the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria. I would like to begin by thanking the chair, the member for Wendouree, along with the deputy chair, the member for Morwell, committee members and the secretariat for their tremendous work in compiling this important report. I would also like to thank everyone who attended hearings, made submissions or hosted a site visit as part of this inquiry. The committee received 118 submissions, conducted five days of public hearings and held numerous regional site visits throughout 2025. That is no small effort and reflects just how much this issue matters to people right across regional Victoria.

Housing underpins everything. When people have a safe, secure and affordable home, they can focus on their children, build careers and put down roots. When they do not, every other part of life gets harder to manage. Our community in Geelong is growing. New estates are appearing and the streets of Lara are filling with young families who come here looking for exactly that – a house with a backyard, a place to build something and put down their roots. I also hear from the people who cannot get there – the young couple who have been saving for years and cannot crack the market; a nurse at Barwon Health driving 45 minutes each way to work because renting near work is not affordable; older residents who want to downsize but cannot find anything suitable; and a family in Corio who came to my office needing help and not knowing where to turn. This report speaks to all of them.

Victoria is building more homes than any other state – nearly 10,000 more than New South Wales and more than 20,000 more than Queensland in the last reported 12 months. But we know there is more to do, particularly in regional Victoria, where population growth is outpacing housing supply. This report makes 12 findings and 34 recommendations. What runs through all of them is a message familiar to anyone representing a fast-growing regional community: building houses is only part of the job. Community infrastructure is vital. The housing mix must reflect how people actually live, not just what is easiest to build. Investment in social housing must be sustained as a long-term commitment, not delivered sporadically.

The report is also clear about who is feeling the pressure most. Those most vulnerable in regional communities are disproportionately affected by insufficient housing supply – young people, older Victorians, people living with a disability, victim-survivors of family violence, migrants, refugees and people living with mental illness. The housing shortage does not land evenly. It falls hardest on the people with the least capacity to absorb it. As the chair wrote in her foreword, stable housing is more

than just shelter; it is the foundation people stand on when they are trying to do everything else in their lives.

I want to speak specifically about what this means for the electorate of Lara, because none of this feels distant to me. According to the Regional Movers Index, Geelong ranks as one of Australia's most popular regional destinations, consistently attracting around 6.6 per cent of all capital city leavers. People are choosing to come here for the lifestyle, the community and the fact that you can still find a backyard without paying Melbourne prices. That is something to be proud of, but it also creates real pressure. The median house value in Greater Geelong now sits at $793,000, up 3.2 per cent over the past year, with tight vacancy rates and limited supply continuing to push prices up. The shift has happened quickly and people across my community are feeling it. When house values sit at that level and rental vacancies are below 2 per cent, the private market simply cannot do the whole job. This underscores the importance of social housing investment provided by the government.

This report makes 12 findings and 34 recommendations, as I mentioned earlier, and there are some incredibly important recommendations in those that I would like to touch on. In Lara West we are looking to accommodate another 11,000 people in approximately 4000 homes, supported by new schools and employment precincts, community facilities, sporting grounds and upgraded infrastructure. What this report really focuses on is the importance of delivering entire communities, not just homes, and delivering infrastructure where people can build their lives, put down their roots, support their children, support their families and support their elderly parents. Anyone who represents a fast-growing community knows pace creates pressure and just how important infrastructure is. This is an incredible report, a very important piece of work that was done, and I commend the report and its recommendations.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (11:20): I would like to start by speaking on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2025–26 budget estimates, specifically regarding chapter 6 on the Department of Transport and Planning in reference to 'New infrastructure projects with highest total investment, 2024–25 to 2028–29'. Included in this report is the very famous and number one local issue that I have been advocating for in this house and externally, which is of course the five-ways intersection, something that I have been raising since my very first speech to Parliament after being elected in August 2023. It is now in this report because of our advocacy, and it really is a win for the community. It is one of those examples of when the community works together in advocacy and we see something take place in funding. I am really proud of our community and what they have achieved by working together to be vocal about this and to advocate for this.

Predating me, this has been an issue in our community for over a decade. It has been an issue that my predecessor raised and also tabled a petition in Parliament about. It is something that impacts locals in the electorate of Warrandyte really significantly and is one of the number one road issues. So it was with immense joy that I saw it in the budget papers, where there is a commitment of both state and federal funding, after having raised it in my two years to that point over 16 times – I think I am now raising it for the 18th time in the house – because it is such a priority to our community. To have the funding secured to now fix this dangerous intersection is a credit to the community and a credit and a win to that community advocacy, and it shows what power there is when we work together.

Recently the government released their community consultation report on the intersection, and it told us things we already knew. But to highlight a few: 81 per cent of respondents said that they felt unsafe or very unsafe the last time they travelled through the intersection, and 86 per cent experienced traffic congestion on their most recent trip. This is of course a daily reality for the 17,000 vehicles that pass through the intersection every single day, with nearly 40 per cent of people reporting delays of 5 to 10 minutes and others experiencing even longer delays. Perhaps most tellingly, 70 per cent of respondents said that they actively avoid the intersection altogether. That is a known reality within the

electorate and something that young people and motorists who have been on the roads for decades have raised with me independently and said to me in my time: 'Five-ways intersection – I don't even bother going that way, because it's a deathtrap.' That is what they have said to me. The functional impact is significant. Seventy per cent of respondents indicated that they actively avoid the intersection and therefore divert instead to roads such as Hall Road, Colman Road and Jumping Creek Road, which also has its own issues. When asked about their primary concerns, 46 per cent identified traffic congestion and queuing as the key issue, followed by poor visibility at 18 per cent and both confusing layout and unsafe driver behaviour at 17 per cent each. It has obviously highlighted these strong issues and the strong support for intervention as well. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents are supportive or very supportive of changes to improve safety. When ranking upgrade options, 47 per cent selected traffic lights as the top priority and 42 per cent selected a roundabout. We will leave that, obviously, to take its due course.

What we see now is that the government has the evidence and has the funding secured. Even though it has been nearly a year since the funding was secured, what the community does not have is clear progress or a clear timeline surrounding this project. They are wanting to know and have asked, and I have therefore asked in the house and of the minister time and again: when will the delivery of this project be, what is the clear timeline and when will this happen? There are still no answers. So that is my fight now: to make sure that the government actually deliver this project – that it is not just consultation but delivery – and for them to finally fix Warrandyte's five-ways intersection.

Moving on to the report from PAEC regarding section 6.5.1 as it relates to free public transport initiatives, speaking on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2025–26 budget estimates, I recently met with Nillumbik council, who stressed to me the importance of bus services in my electorate and the lack of connectivity and accessibility, and that is a lived reality for so many in my community. While the government talks proudly about public transport being free, the reality in my electorate is that there is no connectivity that makes it feasible for people to even use public transport.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (11:25): I used public transport this morning for free, and it was wonderful. It is a really big cost saving for the community that I represent and for so many others across Victoria, and it is very sad that the member for Warrandyte does not support such initiatives, particularly in a cost-of-living crisis. It is very sad to hear, member for Warrandyte.

Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports is what I plan to speak on, and the Deputy Speaker, who is usually in the chair at this time –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Sorry, I did not quite hear the report.

Mathew HILAKARI: *Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports*. It relates to two Auditor-General reports, the first being report 40, *Fraud and Corruption Control: Local Government*, 2019; and audit report 316, *Fraud Control over Local Government Grants*, 2022. I thank the secretariat because I have thanked many others, including the member for Yan Yean next to me, for their efforts in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on this report. The chair of this committee wrote in her foreword:

> Ultimately, integrity in local government depends as much on culture as on compliance. Systems can be designed, but they must also be lived. Leadership, transparency and accountability are not optional features of public service; they are the foundation of trust between communities and their elected representatives.

This is a real challenge in the community that I represent at the moment, and we have all seen the challenges related to particularly the newly elected mayor – I think he is about a week and a half in –

who is under a real cloud. I understand that most recently he has stepped aside but he has not resigned from his position – that is breaking as of this morning. Maybe he should use this opportunity to consider whether he does indeed resign.

I will not say this too often in this place, but even the Leader of the Opposition was calling for members of her own party who have written support letters, character references – something that this government is moving to ban – for people who have ultimately been convicted of very, very serious crimes to no longer run for preselection and said they would not be welcome in their party room. Mr Preet Singh, the mayor – because he has not resigned – is also a member of the Liberal Party, and I hope that the Leader of the Opposition shows that same leadership in calling for that across all public offices, because this is a matter of leadership. I hope that the Liberal Party sees this as a real problem for them, these people who are being preselected – an invidious position that they face, because I do not think there was a lot of choice in this preselection.

Wyndham has had its challenges, and in this place you have heard me talk a few times about Point Cook and the tens of millions of dollars of developer contributions being shifted from the community. For the residents of Point Cook, embedded in their households are developer contributions, yet they are getting shifted across the community because there is probably a real lack of imagination at Wyndham council about opening up their facilities. They say they are going to take this money and move it to other facilities and other suburbs, which they should not. However, there are facilities for community events, for large-scale community events, in the City of Wyndham already, but they choose by policy not to open these up to the public, not to allow the public to have access to the food that they need for their services, for their celebrations. Too often the community that I represent go down the road to Williamstown, down the road to Bacchus Marsh – and down the road is a long way to Bacchus Marsh from Point Cook – because they cannot access the services that they need.

I will take us to finding 24:

> It is difficult for the public to assess the expenditure and planned expenditure by local government …

Their budgets need to improve. There are multibillion-dollar line items in Wyndham that do not describe how they are spending their money. That is a real outrage for our community. It is not something that would be acceptable for federal or state governments at any point in time. We are able to tell from our budgets when the money is going to be spent and how it is going to be spent. There is a lot going on in communities like Wyndham; there is a lot more needed in supporting that. Many people from the community have approached me around the current mayor. I hope he considers his position over the coming days and does what is right for the community and right for the position of mayor, which is important in our community.

Bills

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (11:32): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026:

> In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 (the Bill).
>
> In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.
>
> **Overview of the Bill**
>
> The purpose of the Bill is to create a new statute to regulate the transportation of dangerous goods, including explosives and high consequence dangerous goods (HCDG), by road, rail, or vessel on inland waters. This Bill will also repeal the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* (DG Act) and implement dangerous goods reforms to

transport which are aligned to the relevant amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the OHS Act).

This Bill will align requirements for businesses and industries which utilise dangerous goods, with national dangerous goods transport requirements. To the extent that changes may apply to individual persons, I will discuss the relevant human rights issues below.

Human Rights Issues

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

- the right to freedom from forced work (section 11);
- the right to privacy and reputation (section 13);
- the right to property (section 20);
- the right to a fair hearing (section 24);
- the right to be presumed innocent (section 25(1));
- the right to protection against self-incrimination (section 25(2)(k)); and
- the right not to be punished more than once (section 26).

Freedom from forced work

Section 11 of the Charter relevantly provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour. 'Forced or compulsory labour' does not include court-ordered community work as a condition of release from detention, work or service required because of an emergency threatening the Victorian community or a part of that community, or work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations.

Powers to issue directions

Clause 75 of the Bill sets out the power for an inspector to give an oral or written direction, with a time period for compliance, to a person involved in the transport of dangerous goods where the direction is necessary because of a serious risk of harm to persons or property arising from the transport of dangerous goods.

The compulsion to undertake an activity or to 'do' something as required by a direction made in accordance with clause 75 could potentially, if a broad view of the right was adopted, engage the right to freedom from forced work under s 11 of the Charter, specifically the prohibition on compulsory labour in s 11(2) of the Charter. This being so, I am of the view that if the right is engaged, any work required by a direction issued by an inspector would fall within the scope of the exception in s 11(3)(c) of the Charter, which provides that forced or compulsory labour does not include work or service that 'forms part of normal civil obligations'. As the directions can only be given to a person who is involved in the transport of dangerous goods by vessel on inland water, by road or by rail and in circumstances that pose a serious risk of harm to persons or damage to property, and have a preventative or remedial purpose, namely to stop, mitigate or remedy any risks to health or damage to property, it is likely such directions to take remedial action would constitute a normal civil obligation. This is because a person in control of a regulated item that poses public safety risks assumes duties in relation to managing those risks.

When made in circumstances where dangerous goods are posing a threat to life, the directions would also be exempt under s 11(3)(b) of the Charter, which provides that work or service required because of an emergency threatening the Victorian community or part thereof does not constitute forced or compulsory labour for the purposes of s 11 of the Charter.

In the event that the exceptions in s 11(3) do not apply to the directions that may be made under clause 75, and the right is engaged, I am nevertheless of the view that it is not limited by the provision. The issue with the existing direction power under s 17K of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* is that the power to issue directions is limited to dangers arising from damaged and/or spilled dangerous goods and containers. However, serious impacts to the community and property can be caused by other risks aside from damage or spilled dangerous goods. Therefore, the power to issue directions needs to be broader in scope to address issues of serious risk of harm and prevent or mitigate a major chemical incident.

The ability to direct duty holders who may lack understanding or intentionally be non-compliant, outweighs their right not to be forced to perform work. This is especially so in the context of transport, where an incident on the road may affect the public. Furthermore, compliant duty holders would already be undertaking such requirements in accordance with the Act and regulations; the direction is only to align non-compliant behaviour with the expected level of compliance and to reduce serious risks of harm. As such, I consider that this additional power in the context of dangerous goods is appropriate, justified and proportionate to a legitimate aim and is therefore compatible with the right to freedom from forced work under s 11 of the Charter.

Power to require assistance

Clause 88 of the Bill is similar to section 19 of the DG Act. It enables an inspector to request assistance from a person who occupies a place where dangerous goods or dangerous goods paraphernalia are present, or who manages or controls a place other than a workplace.

Given that this provision requires a person to do a particular thing to assist an inspector, it may be considered to be 'forced or compulsory labour' and therefore may be relevant to section 11 of the Charter. However, the type of assistance required under this provision from an occupier or a person with control of a place, is likely to be practically limited in nature and of low gravity (such as assisting an inspector to gain access to an area or a vehicle). Further, the requirement to assist an inspector may fall within the internal qualification at s 11(3)(c) being a 'normal civil obligation' and therefore not constitute a limit on the right.

Insofar as this assistance may be considered 'forced or compulsory labour' under s 11 of the Charter, any interference with this right would be both minor and temporary such that the right would not be limited.

Right to privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have that person's privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.

Interferences with privacy will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed and will not be 'arbitrary' if it is not capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable in the particular circumstances, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legislation sought.

Entry into residential premises and specified places

Clause 51(3) of the Bill sets out the power to enter residential premises with the consent of the occupier or in circumstances where an inspector reasonably believes dangerous goods are present at that place and a person at the residential premises is contravening or is about to contravene the Act or the regulations.

I consider the framework of the new residential entry power to appropriately balance personal privacy against protection of the wider community from dangerous goods which have unique physical risks such as explosive or other dangerous characteristics, and which can have far reaching consequences. To enter without consent, inspectors must have a reasonable belief that dangerous goods are present at the residential premises and a person at the residential premises is contravening or about to contravene the Act or regulations. This power is confined to circumstances of urgency where a contravention is occurring or about to occur – and will not permit entry to investigate past contraventions of the Act or regulations, which will require a warrant or occupier consent to enter.

Clause 51(4) of the Bill provides an inspector with the ability to enter a specified place where an inspector reasonably believes a serious risk or an immediate risk of harm to a person or property damage is present, and it is necessary to take action to address the risk at the place that is near the specified place. For example, it is necessary to physically traverse through a property to get to the incident site to prevent or reduce harm.

Legislative safeguards set out under clause 51 reduce the impact of any interference upon occupiers' enjoyment of their property. This includes the need for an inspector to give immediate notice of entry, to enter at a reasonable time and to take reasonable steps to obtain consent from an occupier of a residential premises.

As such, a range of safeguards apply to ensure the powers may only be exercised in a reasonable and proportionate way that protects the privacy of individuals as much as possible. The powers serve the important purpose of enabling inspectors to address serious risks of harm caused by the presence or misuse of dangerous goods in transport. Although the powers involve some interference with the privacy, particularly of persons present at residential premises, I consider that the interference is proportionate to the legitimate aim of protecting public health and is neither unlawful nor arbitrary and is therefore compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Other entry powers

Clause 51(1) enables an inspector to enter, at a reasonable time, a place (other than residential premises) believed by the inspector to have dangerous goods or related paraphernalia relating to transport. However, they may also enter at any time if they believe there is an immediate risk of harm under clause 51(2).

Clause 52 includes the power to stop, detain, inspect, or examine any vehicle or vessel used or likely to be used for the transport of dangerous goods. This includes the power for the Authority to, orally or in writing, direct the owner or person in control of the vehicle or vessel, to move the vehicle or vessel, or engage a suitable person to do so, and recover the costs from the owner. Alternatively, the inspector may direct the owner or person in control to move the vehicle or vessel if needed to inspect or examine it, by way of a written direction served on the owner or person.

These powers may interfere with a person's privacy in relation to their premises, vehicle or vessel. However, in my view, this interference is not arbitrary or unlawful, because the entry by inspectors would be pursuant to properly circumscribed legislation, and are qualified by conditions precedent that are proportionate and tailored to the necessity of the situation, being a situation that may endanger public safety or risk property damage. The entry power enables inspectors to carry out their functions and powers under the Act to ensure compliance. There is an appropriate safeguard protecting privacy of home. Accordingly, I am satisfied these clauses balance a person's rights to privacy against the public's interest in having safer dangerous goods transportation.

General powers on entry

Clause 53 outlines the general powers on entry in the new Act, including powers of inspection, examination, enquiry, testing, taking of extracts of documents, seizure of evidence, taking of photographs and measurements, making sketches and all other incidental powers necessary to perform the above. These are similar to existing powers under s 13B(1) of the DG Act, with some minor modernisations and clarifications in the language used. For example, 'seize and remove' will replace the term 'seize' to explicitly state that a thing may be removed. The provision also includes greater clarity as to the range of investigative steps that inspectors are empowered to undertake, including examine, copy or take extracts from a document or seize, make audio, video or any other type of recording, take measurements or make sketches, and remove any substance or other thing for testing, if they reasonably believe that examination or testing in reasonably necessary and cannot be conducted on site.

Clause 53 includes safeguards such as the requirement to give a written record of the seizure and removal as soon as possible to the occupier of the place, minimise disruption and only remain there as long as reasonably necessary. If a vehicle or vessel is used by an inspector to remove or detain dangerous goods then the Authority must pay reasonable compensation for that use to its owner, unless the owner is later found guilty of a related dangerous goods offence. This will also closely mirror the equivalent OHS Act provision.

While the incidental powers on entry do interfere with a person's privacy rights, including into their work or private sphere, I am of the view that, when properly exercised, they are lawful and not arbitrary, given they appropriately balance a person's right to privacy with the need for investigatory powers reasonably required to ensure compliance with and enforcement of health and safety legislation in relation to dangerous goods. To the extent there is any limit on the privacy right, I am of the view that the powers are proportionate and appropriately justified such that they are compatible with the right to privacy under the Charter.

Powers to collect samples

Section 13D of the DG Act enables the collection of samples of any thing at the place that may require analysis. Similarly, clause 55 of the Bill enables an inspector to require an occupier or apparent occupier to give them samples of anything at a place that may require analysis and includes an offence provision for non-compliance. While this may interfere with a person's privacy, I am of the view that any such impact is minimal, and is lawful and not arbitrary, given the sample taking is for analysis only and is proportionate to the purposes of the limitation, which is to protect public health in the context of dangerous goods transport. The provision is also subject to the notification safeguards and requirements of clause 509(3). I am therefore content that clause 55 is compatible with the right to privacy.

Power to make inquiries following certain incidents

Given the risks to health and safety associated with dangerous goods, there is a power provided for in clause 56 for an inspector to make any necessary inquiries into certain incidents, such as where a fire or explosion results in the death or injury of a person, property damage or public danger from the presence of dangerous goods. For the purpose of making such an inquiry, an inspector may enter any place.

This power mirrors similar powers of incident inquiry currently provided by section 13E of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*. Whilst a power of entry may interfere with the privacy of the person whose property or business it is, on balance, any such interference is considered justified and appropriate given the serious nature of the incident which has taken place. Inquiring into the incident, as necessary, may help understand the cause and prevent reoccurrences or future events. Accordingly, I consider that clause 56 is compatible with the right to privacy.

Entry via a search warrant

Clause 59 sets out the mechanism for an inspector to apply to the Magistrates' Court to obtain a search warrant for a particular place. There needs to be a reasonably held belief that a 'thing' is at the place within the next 72 hours, and it may afford evidence of an offence against the Act or regulations. There is a high standard of proof to satisfy that criteria and obtain a court issued warrant. The warrant must be applied for in accordance with the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*. There are also other procedural protocols under the Act, including an announcement on entry. These legislated protocols ensure that the court is satisfied certain thresholds are met,

and that the carrying out of the warrant is done according to set protocols and procedures. This helps to safeguard a person's right to privacy. Therefore, to the extent that powers to search a particular place interfere with a person's privacy rights, it is my view that any such limitation on a person's rights is justified and appropriate in a democratic society.

Power for an inspector to intervene

Where a person who has been given a direction under clause 75(1) fails to carry out the direction, or is unlikely to safely comply with it, clause 76 of the Bill provides an inspector with a subsequent power to intervene by taking action to address the serious risk before harm eventuates. Clause 76(2) also allows an inspector to intervene without the issue of a direction if the inspector reasonably believes that there is an immediate risk of harm to any person, or property damage arising from the dangerous goods transport. Under this provision, a higher threshold of risk is required to intervene without the issue of a preceding direction. For example, if an inspector observes flammable dangerous goods stored near an active heat source in a well-ventilated area. Given the immediate risk of fire an inspector may use their power to intervene to take immediate action to stop operations and evacuate the area.

The intervention power is contingent on a high level of risk and therefore a requisite need to act to prevent the eventuation of harm to persons or property. Given there will generally be opportunity for a person who is issued a direction to address a serious risk themselves, any interference with their right to privacy occasioned by this provision is expected to be minimal, particularly as clause 76(3) provides that the intervention provisions do not apply in relation to residential premises. Accordingly, any intervention would presumably occur in a workplace or some other area where a reduced expectation of personal privacy exists, and would be less likely to interfere with a person's private sphere.

However, to the extent that clause 76 does interfere with a person's right to privacy, I consider that the importance of preventing harm from dangerous goods incidents outweighs any such interference, such that any limit on the right is reasonable and demonstrably justifiable and appropriate in the circumstances. I am therefore content that clause 76 is compatible with the right to privacy.

Power to issue notices

Clauses 66 to 68 of the Bill creates powers for an inspector to issue various notices in relation to dangerous goods transport.

Relevantly, clause 68 includes a power for an inspector to issue a prohibition notice in circumstances where an inspector reasonably believes an activity involving the transport of dangerous goods is occurring, or may occur, at a place that involves or will involve a serious risk to the health or safety of any person or a serious risk of property damage. The prohibition notice ceases to have effect upon the inspector certifying in writing that the matters giving rise to the risk have been remedied. Accordingly, clause 68 engages the right to privacy by prohibiting a person from undertaking a particular activity involving dangerous goods transport.

Clause 67 of the Bill sets out the power to issue improvement notices. It is similar to section 17C of the DG Act and includes an ability to provide necessary interim directions or conditions to minimise risks to person, property or environment. This will align with the proposed amendment to section 111 of the OHS Act in the OHS Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. The notice must state the basis for the inspector's belief for issuing the notice, the alleged contravened provision of the Act or regulations, date by which the person must remedy the alleged contravention, review rights and more. The requirement for such information ensures accountability as each alleged contravention needs to be explicitly stated; mitigating the likelihood of breaches unfairly impacting a person's rights or freedoms.

Through the exercise of issuing a notice, an inspector who will be enforcing dangerous goods transport laws may access personal information and may also specify certain activities, or how the activities must be carried out which again may interfere with a person's freedom of expression.

I am of the view, however, that these powers are lawful and not arbitrary as inspectors would issue the notice pursuant to a properly circumscribed law employing an appropriately high threshold (requiring a serious risk to health, safety or property) that is proportionate to the purpose of the notices, which is to protect persons and property from harm or damage, particularly in the context of dangerous goods transport.

Further, the powers are exercisable only within the confines of the legislation and are justified and appropriate to ensure compliance. Information which is captured is not to be shared, unless it meets a threshold requirement set out in the legislation and discussed in the paragraphs below.

Power to require a name and address or to obtain information

Clause 74 enables an inspector to require a person to state their name and address if the inspector reasonably believes that the person may be able to assist in the investigation of an indictable offence under this Act. The right to privacy includes a right to be left alone and a protection against a compulsion to disclose personal

information. This power is a necessary power to facilitate investigation and verify the identity of persons of interest or suspicion. It is limited to specific circumstances and qualified by the requirement to have reasonably belief in those circumstances. The inspector must inform the person of the grounds of their belief, which increases accountability for the inspector's actions, and ensures a just and appropriate use of powers for requiring certain limited information. This is appropriate in a democratic society, where the compulsion of information and impact to a person's rights must be weighed against the public's interest in having a safer community.

Power to require other information

Clause 91 allows an inspector to take copies or extracts of documents provided to the inspector, which may interfere with a person's rights to privacy.

Clause 153 sets out a power to obtain information or a document in custody of a person, for the purpose of ascertaining Act or regulatory compliance. This power is subject to a limited protection regarding self-incrimination, which will be discussed in more detail below under the right not to be compelled to testify (s 25(2)(k)).

In relation to the interference with privacy, the notice is limited to a specified purpose for requiring information, being for the purpose of ascertaining whether this Bill or the regulations have been complied with, or for investigating a suspected contravention. The Authority, as a public authority under the Charter, will be obliged to give consideration to the right to privacy when issuing a Notice and determining the scope of information to be required. The provision is common to the standard powers of a regulator to obtain information in relation to subject-matter concerning risk to public safety and environmental protection, and accordingly, I am satisfied that is compatible with the right to privacy.

Information sharing and publication

Clause 151 sets out the circumstances in which information may be used or shared. The clause provides that nothing precludes a person's use of information to the extent that it is necessary for the Authority's duties or functions or in the course of relevant legal proceedings. It also allows for the sharing of information with government agencies, municipal councils or law enforcement agencies (if it is in the public's interest), corresponding authorities, and bodies approved by the Governor in Council, amongst others.

The provision is intended to operate in a similar manner as section 10D of the DG Act and apply to listed persons who are appointed or otherwise engaged by the Authority.

These provisions will enable the Authority to share information proactively with a wider cohort of persons or bodies, reducing complexity in sharing information and supporting a coordinated inter-agency response towards non-compliance, which may be of particular importance in the transport context where dangerous goods may be moving quickly from place to place.

The Authority will be able to rely on clause 151 to share information with certain persons or bodies, including law enforcement agencies, public sector bodies, Government departments or statutory authorities or councils if the Authority reasonably believes it is in the public interest or necessary for the Authority's exercise of powers or functions, or necessary for collaboration or to eliminate/reduce serious risks to health, safety or property.

While this provision will promote information sharing and reduce opportunities for rogue operators to fall out of the line of sight of regulators who share remit, the disclosure of information by the Authority risks interfere with privacy rights to the extent that it may involve the disclosure of personal information. However, I do not consider that the right will be limited, because the information shared is unlikely to include sensitive, personal or health information, and is for a limited and specific purpose including to protect public health and safety and to enable a more proactive regulatory approach across government and other bodies, and would be pursuant to legislation. Existing legislative safeguards in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* will continue to protect the integrity of information sharing practices.

In my view, therefore, clause 151 is compatible with right to privacy under the Charter.

Adverse Publicity Orders

Clause 128 enables Adverse Publicity Orders to be issued in relation to dangerous goods transport. The aim is to provide the regulator with a range of orders which can be made in addition to, or instead of, another penalty type imposed by the court.

This provision will grant the court discretion to make an adverse publicity order having found a person guilty of an offence. The order may require an offender to publicise the offence or contravention, its consequences, the penalty imposed and any related matter, and/or to notify a specified person of the offence or contravention and its consequences. The offender must then give the Authority evidence of their compliance with the order. Failure to do so, or do so adequately, enables the Authority to take the relevant actions specified in the adverse

publicity notice, including publicising the offender's offence and penalty. Clause 128(5) provides that a court not make an adverse publicity order unless satisfied that the costs of complying with the order do not exceed the maximum penalty amount that the court may impose on the offender for the offence concerned.

These provisions may give rise to the publication of the identity of individuals and their convictions under the Act, and thereby may impact negatively upon the reputation of those individuals, and interfere with their right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked under s 13(b) of the Charter. However, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy and reputation resulting from these provisions will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. Adverse publicity orders will be made by a court pursuant to properly circumscribed legislation and are a proportionate measure aimed at notifying the public about operators who are non-compliant with health and safety legislation in respect of the transport of dangerous goods and deter future non-compliance.

In my view, it is appropriate and reasonable in the circumstances that there is a power to name persons and detail conduct by way of Adverse Publicity Order as it serves the purposes of promoting accountability and transparency as to non-compliance and reflects important public policy. It may also help to deter other similar duty holders in the dangerous goods transport industry. I therefore consider that clause 128 is compatible with the right to privacy and reputation under the Charter.

Further, an adverse publicity order may only be made following conviction for an offence, with the associated safeguards of principles of justice and procedural fairness applying to the exercise of judicial discretion and the court process. Further, information in respect of a court order is likely to be on the public record in any event due to the judicial proceedings.

Property rights

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

Certain insurance provisions are void

Clause 162 of the Bill replicates section 51D of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*, by setting out that a term of a contract, or other arrangement, that purports to insure or indemnify a person for the person's liability to pay a pecuniary penalty under this Act, is void to the extent that the term provides for that insurance or indemnity. This provision may interfere with existing contractual rights, which would likely be regarded as falling within the definition of property under the Charter.

The reason for making such a provision void, is to prevent unscrupulous behaviour by operators who may seek to avoid their liability by gaining insurance to cover their acts or omissions which may not have been done in good faith. The provision thereby promotes accountability for operators' behaviour. I consider the provision to satisfy the requirements of being in accordance with law, and to be compatible with the Charter's property right.

To the extent that Clause 162 may also interfere with broader freedoms to enter into arrangements or to seek insurance, I consider that, on balance, the interference is appropriate and justified to the extent that it helps to protect persons and property from harm.

Powers to impose a charge on land

As outlined above, clause 76 enables an inspector to intervene and undertake remediation works on a property where an inspector issues a direction and the person in receipt has failed, or is likely to fail, to comply. An inspector may also intervene if there is an immediate risk of harm to persons or damage to property or the environment.

Clause 77 enables the Authority to issue a costs notice to a person whom the Authority reasonably believes caused the circumstances which led to the inspector's intervention as well as to an occupier or previous occupier of the relevant place.

Clause 78 then allows the Authority to commence legal proceedings to seek to recover the remediation costs specified in a costs notice if a person to whom the notice has been issued does not pay within the relevant time period.

Clause 80 of the Bill then enables a charge to be imposed on the land on which the inspector took the intervention action if the costs notice is unpaid at the end of the relevant payment period and the Authority has followed the required procedure for advertising. The lodgment of such a charge may interfere with a person's right not to be deprived of their property, other than in accordance with law. This is because a charge may affect the way in which a person uses their property, including affecting ownership rights and property transactions.

Safeguards under s 106B of the *Transfer of Land Act 1958* apply to the imposition of the charge and removal thereof, requiring the Authority to comply with such requirements.

Given a charge on land may restrict or prevent the transfer of that land, clause 80 may therefore be relevant to property rights under s20 of the Charter. However, the charge would be imposed pursuant to a properly circumscribed law that is precise and accessible by the public, in order to facilitate the recovery of remediation costs incurred due to a breach of dangerous goods transport laws. Therefore, in my view, any interference with a landowner's property rights will be in accordance with the law and such that the provisions are compatible with s 20 of the Charter.

Sale of land to recover debt

Clause 82 of the Bill then provides the Authority with the power to enforce a charge imposed on the land under clause 80 if the charge has been registered for at least 12 months, and the court has made an order requiring payment and payment has not been made within 12 months of the recovery order being made.

The sale of property to recover remediation costs will deprive the relevant property owner of that property and therefore interfere with their property rights under s 20 of the Charter. However, I am content that the right is not limited because the deprivation of property would be pursuant to law, and is a reasonable and proportionate measure to recover debts incurred in remediating OHS breaches in respect of dangerous goods. Judicial oversight of costs enforcement proceedings and the requirement for the making of a court order before land can be sold, as well as notice requirements to the landowner, properly safeguards property rights. I consider that the provision strikes an appropriate balance between the rights of the affected parties and enabling the Authority to recover outstanding debts and properly administer its compliance and enforcement regime in respect of dangerous goods. I am therefore of the view that clause 82 is compatible with the right to property under the Charter.

Forfeiture of seized property

Division 7 of Part 5 of the Bill creates provisions which are specific to the return and forfeiture of seized things (including HCDG, explosives and containers). These provisions are based on forfeiture provisions under section 16B of the DG Act. These relate to a thing or document (exclusive of HCDG, explosives or related containers) and set out the parameters for forfeiture of such seized things. This may include forfeiture when the Authority cannot find or return the goods to their owner despite making reasonable enquiries or efforts to do so, or when necessary to prevent an offence. The provision does require written notification to the owner with the review rights.

Clause 62 requires the Authority to, as soon as possible after seizing anything, return the thing to its owner unless the Authority considers it necessary to retain because it may afford evidence in a proceeding, it has been forfeited, the owner transferred ownership or the Authority is otherwise authorised to retain, destroy or dispose of the thing. Clause 63 pertains to the forfeiture of seized items.

Clause 64 creates a similar provision to clause 62 but is specific to the return or forfeiture of seized HCDG, explosives and containers. Under this provision, the Authority is required to return the thing to its owner immediately where retention is no longer necessary, unless forfeited to the Authority under clause 63 of the Bill.

If not immediately returned or forfeited, then the Authority must return it within 12 months of seizure or as soon after a proceeding and appeal has concluded. However, the Authority is not permitted to return it to a person unauthorised under the Act to possess the thing, and need not return it if the Authority cannot reasonably locate, or return it to, its owner. Clause 65 also allows for the forfeiture of HCDG, explosives and containers used in connection with these items, where the owner cannot be found, is unknown, or where the items cannot be returned despite reasonable efforts.

While the forfeiture of goods can interfere with property rights, I am of the view that the interference is lawful, being pursuant to properly circumscribed legislation in circumstances where the goods have and may still pose a risk to public safety, and where efforts have been made to locate the owner and return the goods. Accordingly, I consider these clauses are compatible with the right to property under the Charter.

Forfeiture and disposal order

Clause 107 enables various entities to seek an order from the Magistrates' Court for forfeiture and disposal of HCDG, explosives or containers before any contravention of the OHS legislation has occurred, legal proceedings have been conducted or a conviction recorded. There are certain requirements including that the Court must be satisfied that unless forfeited or destroyed there is a reasonable likelihood that a contravention of the Act or offence against this Act or another, will occur. Special provision for this is required given that the storage of these specific dangerous goods may expose the Authority's workers to higher safety risks. In cases where seized explosives are unknown, they may well be past their expiration date and unstable, making

it riskier for WorkSafe's magazine keeper to store the explosives. Explosives and high consequence dangerous goods require strict procedures and security measures for their storage.

While clause 107 may interfere with the HCDG owners' property rights, I am of the view that there is no limit on s 20, as the forfeiture of property is in accordance with the law, overseen by the Magistrates Court and is a proportionate measure to ensure public safety in the context of dangerous goods.

Right to a fair hearing

Section 24 of the Charter recognises a right to a fair hearing so that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

Rights of appeal process to Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)

Part 6 of the Bill sets out the review process for eligible persons whose interests are affected by an administrative decision.

Section 10A of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* enables the Authority's administrative decisions to be reviewable by Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) without a prior internal review.

The Bill will not replicate this right to a merits review from VCAT in relation to directions and step-in powers used by inspectors in relation to dangerous goods transport. Reviews will be limited to judicial review only. This will maintain a pathway to ensure inspectors are acting within their legal authority; but removes an alternative decision outcome based upon a merits review from VCAT.

The removal of the right to apply to VCAT for review of directions and step-in powers decisions of the Authority is relevant to the right to fair hearing under s 24(1) of the Charter, which utilises a broad concept of 'civil proceeding' that encompasses administrative decision-makers with powers to determine private rights and interests. While recognising the broad scope of s 24(1), the term 'proceeding' and 'party' suggest that s 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties. As many of the decisions here (directions and step-in powers) do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, there is a question as to whether the right to a fair hearing is engaged. In any event, I will proceed to discuss the impact on fair hearing in the event a broad reading of s 24(1) is adopted.

While the opportunity to be heard by an independent tribunal on merits review has now been removed, an affected person will still ultimately have the right of judicial review.

To the extent, however that fair hearing rights are limited, in that an applicant is not afforded a right to merits review before an independent tribunal in relation to a decision which affects their private rights, I am satisfied that the limits are reasonable and justified in the circumstances in accordance with s 7(2) of the Charter. This is because the powers to issue a direction and to intervene are based upon a risk assessment at a point in time and by an officer with technical expertise in assessing dangerous goods. In my view, this type of decision is not suited to a merits review by a generalist tribunal such as VCAT which lacks the necessary technical expertise to make an informed decision. The VCAT process can also cause significant delays to exercising powers in instances of serious or immediate risk that require an urgent response. I consider that the removal of merits reviews in VCAT, while have the potential to engage the right to a fair hearing, appropriately balances this interference with rights with the need to take urgent action in the face of serious risks to public health and safety.

Accordingly, I am content that Part 6 of the Bill is compatible with the right to fair hearing under s 24 of the Charter.

Right to be presumed innocent

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

Reasonable or lawful excuse offence provision

The following clauses insert offences which contain a 'reasonable excuse' or 'lawful excuse' exception:

- Clause 20 – Duty to not recklessly engage in the transport of dangerous goods that places or may place a person in danger of serious injury or death.
- Clause 22 – Failure to notify the Authority immediately after becoming aware that an incident has occurred during the transport of dangerous goods.
- Clause 23 – Failure to preserve incident sites.
- Clause 52 – Failure to comply with a direction.

- Clause 54 – Failure to produce a document or part of a document or to answer questions.
- Clause 55 – Failure to give an inspector samples.
- Clause 66 – Failure to comply with a non-disturbance notice.
- Clause 75 – Failure to comply with a direction.
- Clause 86 – Failure to comply with a modified section 75 direction.
- Clause 87 – Failure to comply with a modified section 75 direction.
- Clause 88(1) and (2) – Failure for occupier or person with management and control to provide assistance to an inspector that they may reasonably require.
- Clause 153 – Failure to give information or produce a document.
- Clause 163 – Duty to not enter into, or be party to, a contract or arrangement that purports to insure or indemnify someone against liability to pay a pecuniary penalty under this Act or regulations.

By creating a 'reasonable excuse' or 'lawful excuse' exception, these offences place an evidential burden on the accused, in that they require the accused to raise evidence of a reasonable excuse. However, in doing so, these offences do not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable or lawful excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution to prove the essential elements of the offence. I therefore do not consider that an evidential onus of this kind limits the right to be presumed innocent.

Accordingly, I am of the view that the above clauses are compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence under s 25(1) of the Charter.

Presumptions in criminal proceedings

Clause 103 sets out matters that, when provided in evidence by an inspector in criminal matters, are presumed to be factual. For example, Clause 103(1)(a) provides that, in a proceeding for an offence, where an inspector gives evidence that they suspected that dangerous goods were involved in an offence and provides evidence of the grounds of their suspicion, and the court considers that suspicion is reasonable, the particular dangerous goods are taken to have been involved in the offence unless contrary evidence is provided. Subsections (1)(b)–(d) provide similar provisions for other evidence that is provided by an inspector.

Section 25(1) is not engaged where there is an evidential burden as opposed to a persuasive burden. To avoid doubt, clause 103 places an evidential burden on the accused by requiring them to raise evidence to rebut the prima facie evidence. However, the legal burden of proof for the matter overall continues to remain with the Authority who must prove the elements of the offence. If the accused provides evidence that rebuts the prima facie evidence, the evidential burden shifts back to the prosecution to lead evidence which proves the allegation. Noting this, the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter is not engaged or limited.

Forfeiture and disposal orders

Before making a forfeiture and disposal order under clause 107, subclause (3) requires the Magistrates' Court to be satisfied that there is a reasonable likelihood that, if the order is not made, the HCDG, explosives or container used for the transport of the same will be used in connection with a contravention of the Act or regulations or any other Act. The court must also be satisfied that the Order is in the interests of public safety.

When making an order under subclause (3), clause 107(4)(b) also provides for the Magistrates' Court to include findings of fact as to the quantity or nature of dangerous goods to include in a forfeiture and disposal order. A finding of fact can subsequently be produced in proceedings and as provided under Clause 107(6) will be prima facie evidence of the matter to which the finding relates.

The prima facie evidence status of a finding of fact in such an order is relevant to the right to presumption of innocence under s 25(1) because it places an evidential burden for the accused by requiring them to raise evidence to the contrary. It does not transfer the legal burden of proof. If evidence sufficient to rebut the prima facie evidence is raised by the defendant, the evidential burden shifts back to the prosecution to lead evidence which supports the finding of fact.

I do not consider that the prima facie evidence status of an order issued under Clause 107 limits the right to be presumed innocent, and Clause 107 of the Bill is therefore compatible with this right.

Right to protection against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled without discrimination to (amongst other things) not be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained

under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Production of documents

Section 19F(1) of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* currently allows a person to refuse or fail to give information or do any other thing that the person is required to do under this Act if giving the information, or doing the other thing, would tend to incriminate the person. Section 19F(2) however excludes the production of a document or part of a document required by the Act; or the giving of a person's name or address in accordance with section 18 of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*.

Clause 160 of the Bill replicates that privilege and sets out the protection against self-incrimination in relation to the provision of information, but not in relation to the production of documents or the giving of one's name and address. To the extent that the Authority can compel the production of a document, there may be interference with the right against self-incrimination under s25(2)(k) of the Charter.

At common law, the High Court has held that the protection accorded to pre-existing documents in relation to self-incrimination is considerably weaker than that accorded to oral testimony or to documents that are brought into existence to comply with a request for information. The compulsion to produce pre-existing documents that speak for themselves is in strong contrast to testimonial oral or written evidence that is brought into existence as a direct response to questions. This is particularly so in the context of a regulated industry or subject matter (such as dangerous goods), where documents or records are required to be produced during the course of a person's participation in that industry or engagement with that regulated subject matter, and are brought into existence for the dominant purpose of demonstrating that person's compliance with relevant duties and obligations when inspected. This is particularly justified where the main purpose of the regulation is to protect the public and prevent harm to persons and property in relation to the transport of dangerous goods.

The duty to provide documents in this context is consistent with the reasonable expectations of persons who are engaging within a regulated scheme and assuming the responsibilities and duties that apply to a person's manufacture, storage, transport, transfer, sale and use of dangerous goods. To provide for a full document-use immunity would unreasonably obstruct the role of inspectors and the accountability aims of the record-keeping obligations, as well as give the holders of such documents an unfair forensic advantage in relation to criminal and civil penalty investigations. Accordingly, any protection afforded to documentary material by the privilege is limited in scope and not as fundamental to the nature of the right as the protection against the requirement that verbal answers be provided. A further safeguard is provided excusing the disclosure of any information the subject of client legal privilege.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that clause 160 of the Act is compatible with the protection of self-incrimination afforded under s 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which that person has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy. However, the principle only applies in respect of criminal offences – it will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa.

The civil penalty regime in Division 3 of Part 7 of the Bill may interfere with a person's right not to be punished more than once given the proposed parallel operation of the civil penalty regimes with criminal laws. The civil penalty regime is modelled on the *Environment Protection Act 2017* which provides that a person cannot be given a civil penalty order if a person has been convicted of an offence constituting the same conduct.

Clause 116 of the Bill provides that the Court must not make a civil penalty order against a person who has been convicted of an offence constituted by substantially the same conduct.

Clause 117 of the Bill then provides that civil proceedings for contravention of a civil penalty provision must be stayed if criminal proceedings are brought for an offence constituted by substantially the same conduct that is alleged to constitute the civil penalty contravention.

These provisions seek to protect against concurrent civil and criminal proceedings for conduct that is substantially the same. However, if a person is not convicted of the criminal offence, Clause 117(2) provides that civil penalty proceedings may be resumed.

Clause 118 enables criminal proceedings to be brought against a person regardless of whether a civil penalty order has been made for conduct that is substantially the same as the conduct constituting the offence. Accordingly, a person may receive a civil penalty and then have a subsequent criminal sanction imposed upon

a conviction for the same conduct, which is relevant to the protection against double punishment. Whether the right is limited in this context will depend on whether the civil penalty is of such nature and magnitude to constitute truly penal consequences. In my view, the civil penalties for breaching the relevant provisions would not be considered to be punitive, or in effect, criminal sanctions. Although some of the maximum pecuniary penalties are up to 2000 penalty units, the purpose of the civil penalties is to encourage regulatory compliance, which is necessary due to the serious risks of harm to human health that may arise from a contravention of the Act. A civil penalty order will be enforceable as a judgment debt and a person will not be liable to be imprisoned for failure to discharge the debt.

While I do not consider that these clauses limit s 26 of the Charter, to the extent that right may be limited, if a court should consider that the larger civil penalties do constitute punishment, I am of the view that the limit is reasonable and justified in the circumstances. This approach mirrors the 'pyramid of sanctions' model of enforcement employed by comparative regulatory schemes in other jurisdictions. This model is predicated on findings that implementing a bar against the use of both criminal and civil proceedings can undermine effective enforcement. Civil penalty proceedings can be more efficient in enforcing the scheme and deterring misconduct due to the lower burden of proof, streamlined procedure, availability of negotiated settlements and lower costs. However, civil penalties alone can be an insufficient deterrent in relation to the more serious and harmful misconduct which warrant criminal punishment. Criminal sanctions are directed at appropriate punishment and serve as a greater deterrent. A criminal conviction poses much more reputational risks for a defendant, with bad publicity and stigma of a conviction far outweighing the label attached to an adverse decision in civil proceedings and/or the making of civil penalty orders. The availability to commence criminal proceedings notwithstanding whether a civil penalty has been imposed is an important part of the pyramidal structure of enforcement of sanctions for more serious cases, while still providing for effective and efficient deterrence.

The Bill implements sufficient safeguards to protect criminal process rights, including deeming any information and documents produced by an individual in a proceeding for a contravention order to be inadmissible in a criminal proceeding concerning substantially the same conduct. Further, the Bill does not interfere with existing sentencing discretions, including a sentencing judge's consideration of the principle of totality and rule against double punishment in relation to imposing a criminal sanction for substantially the same conduct already subject to a civil contravention order.

Accordingly, I consider that this Bill is compatible with the right not to be tried or punished more than once as set out in s 26 of the Charter.

Rights in criminal proceedings

Section 25(1) of the Charter sets out that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law and section 25(2) provides for minimum guarantees relating to prompt information about the offence and appropriate defence opportunities, amongst other things.

Power to redirect certain body corporate obligations

Clauses 86 and 87 of the Bill will adopt a new power for the Authority to issue a notice to redirect certain body corporate obligations to appropriate officers of the body corporate or other persons to whom a notice was issued. These provisions may be relevant to the presumption of innocence to the extent that they may operate to deem an individual liable for the actions of the body corporate that are indictable offences and carry criminal penalties (being a failure to comply with a non-disturbance notice, improvement notice or prohibition notice).

However, to the extent that this results in a limit on the right, I consider the limit reasonably justified. The power serves an important and legitimate purpose. The power will ensure obligations follow responsible individuals who might reasonably be said to bear some responsibility for the non-compliance. It would ensure that bodies corporates cannot avoid accountability by going into liquidation or phoenixing to avoid obligations and allow the Authority to continue to prosecute the responsible party for non-compliance. In my view, it is appropriate to transfer obligations under the Bill to officers of bodies corporate, and to make principals liable for the conduct of the body corporate and its employees and agents, in order to ensure proper compliance with the relevant OHS schemes and to protect public health and safety. A person who elects to undertake a position as an officer of a body corporate accepts that they will be subject to certain requirements and duties, including a duty to ensure that the body corporate complies with its legal obligations, and does not commit offences. Affected persons should be well aware of the regulatory requirements and, as such, should have the necessary processes and systems in place to effectively meet these requirements and not incur accessorial liability.

In terms of the extent of the limitation, the power is conditional on the Authority being satisfied of a number of mandatory elements with a relatively high threshold, including that the person knew or ought reasonably to have known of the circumstances that resulting the issuing of the specified notice, was in a position to influence the body corporate in relation to its compliance with the specified notice, and, in the case of a failure

to comply, and that it would not be oppressive, unjust or unreasonable for the Authority to issue the officer the redirection notice. In being satisfied of the last matter, being that the redirection notice was not oppressive, unjust or unreasonable, the Authority will relevantly need to take into account human rights under the Charter, including the presumption of innocence.

Finally, the prosecution would still be required to prove each element of an offence, and any burden placed on an officer (such as to establish an applicable reasonable excuse defence) would be evidential only. In my view, there are no less restrictive means reasonably available for ensuring adequate deterrence for bodies corporate for breaches of OHS requirements in respect of the transport of dangerous good that may cause significant public harm.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that these provisions are compatible with the right under the Charter to the presumption of innocence.'

The Hon Ben Carroll MP
Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC

Second reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (11:32): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill gives effect to reforms that will improve safety for the Victorian community by modernising the regulation of the transport of dangerous goods and strengthening WorkSafe's ability to enforce compliance with dangerous goods transport laws.

This Bill delivers on the Victorian Government's commitment to implement legislative reforms recommended in the *Final Report of the Independent Review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and associated regulations* led by Andrew Palmer KC, now Judge Palmer (the Palmer Report).

The Victorian Government commissioned the Independent Review in response to the major chemical fires that occurred in suburban Melbourne in 2018 and 2019 as a result of illegal stockpiling of chemicals. These fires released significant amounts of toxic smoke and dangerous chemicals in suburban Melbourne, affecting nearby communities. The Independent Reviewer was asked to review Victoria's dangerous goods laws and regulations to strengthen laws and help prevent such significant incidents from occurring again.

The Palmer Report found that the current dangerous goods regulatory framework is outdated, difficult to navigate and inconsistent with other regulatory frameworks dangerous goods duty holders are required to comply with. The Independent Reviewer also considered that this is likely contributing to non-compliance and illegal activity as unscrupulous operators take advantage of weaknesses in regulation and regulatory oversight. To address these findings the Palmer Report made 49 recommendations, including four recommendations specific to the transport of dangerous goods. This Bill gives effect to accepted recommendations from the Palmer Report that are relevant to the transport of dangerous goods in Victoria.

This Bill has been drafted with regard to the Model Act on the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road or Rail to promote national consistency in the safety requirements and controls that apply to the transport of dangerous goods. The regulations, which will be developed after the passage of the Bill, will also promote consistency with other jurisdictions through the application of the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road & Rail (ADG Code). This Bill will also regulate the transport of explosives and high consequence dangerous goods, including management of security risks arising from their transport. However, the Bill includes some differences from the national approach, such as the inclusion of a broad general duty applying to a person involved in the transport of dangerous goods by vessel on inland waters, by road or by rail. The Victorian Government considers that such differences are appropriate to align administrative procedure and regulatory functions and powers with other Victorian statutes, and importantly, to align with reforms to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 contained in the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026.

I will now address the key amendments in more detail.

Transport-specific dangerous goods legislation will support the transport industry

This Bill provides transport-specific dangerous goods laws to support businesses to understand and comply with their duties. It will also provide WorkSafe Victoria, as the regulator of dangerous goods transport, with a suite of modern regulatory tools to promote and enforce compliance with dangerous goods transport laws.

The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 will modernise and incorporate the regulation of all other dangerous goods activities into the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. Similar obligations and language across occupational health and safety laws and dangerous goods transport laws will promote consistency and streamline laws for the benefit of duty holders and the wider community.

This Bill will also repeal the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, which is over 40 years old. This will allow for this Bill if enacted to provide the primary regulatory framework for the transport of dangerous goods by road, by rail and by vessel on inland waters in Victoria. It will also allow for the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to become the primary framework for the regulation of the handling of dangerous goods.

Consistent duties will make it easier for duty holders to understand responsibilities

The Bill modernises the regulation of the transport of dangerous goods by introducing a broad general duty requiring a person involved in the transport of dangerous goods to ensure that dangerous goods are transported in a manner that is safe and without risks to public safety, property and the environment. This duty applies to dangerous goods transported by road or rail or on a vessel on inland waters in the State of Victoria. Broad, principle-based duties are a familiar feature of Victoria's regulatory landscape with Victorian industry already subject to duties-based regulation in the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and the Environment Protection Act 2017. Importantly, the new general duty applying to the transport of dangerous goods aligns with the new general duty applying to the handling of dangerous goods in the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. This will ensure that dangerous goods duty holders are subject to similar duties-based regulatory frameworks across the lifecycle of dangerous goods.

The Bill also provides for the new transport of dangerous goods general duty to be supported by regulations, the ADG Code, Compliance Codes and non-statutory guidance for duty holders. These will provide duty holders with further information about how the transport of dangerous goods general duty should be performed and will promote continued improvements to the state of knowledge about ensuring the safe transport of dangerous goods.

Strengthening the regulation of dangerous goods waste

The *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* currently provides the primary framework for regulating the transport of dangerous goods in Victoria but does not apply to the transport of reportable priority waste subject to the *Environment Protection Act 2017*.

The Palmer Report found that this exemption has resulted in the transport of dangerous goods waste not being subject to the same safety requirements that apply to the transport of all other dangerous goods. However, the same risks arise when transporting dangerous goods waste as those that arise when transporting all other dangerous goods. Accordingly, the Palmer Report recommended that the transport of all dangerous goods be subject to the same requirements regardless of whether they are also waste. This Bill delivers on that recommendation and will apply consistently to ensure the safe transport of both dangerous goods and dangerous goods waste.

The *Environment Protection Act 2017* will continue to apply to risks of harm to human health or the environment from the transport of dangerous goods waste.

Strengthened enforcement, prosecution and penalties

This Bill ensures that there is an effective enforcement system comprising a range of enforcement options that are flexible enough to deter the full range of non-compliant behaviour. Importantly, enforcement options provided in this Bill are consistent with those that will apply to the handling of dangerous goods should the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods Bill) 2026 be enacted.

Contravention of the transport of dangerous goods general duty will be subject to significant maximum penalties of 2,000 penalty units for a natural person and 10,000 penalty units for a body corporate. The Bill also includes offences for an aggravated breach of the transport of dangerous goods general duty, and for a person who recklessly engages in the transport of dangerous goods that places, or may place, another person in danger of serious injury or death. These offences will apply to circumstances where the conduct of the offender represents a higher degree of culpability than other offences in the Act. An aggravated breach will be subject to higher maximum penalties of 4,000 penalty units, 5 years imprisonment or both for a natural person and 20,000 penalty units for a body corporate. The recklessness offence will be subject to maximum

penalties of 5,000 penalty units, 10 years imprisonment or both for a natural person or 40,000 penalty units for a body corporate.

The Bill also expands the enforcement tools that can be used to address breaches across a range of transport of dangerous goods offences. This includes the introduction of civil penalties provisions which will offer alternative legal proceedings where criminal prosecution is not warranted. Where a civil penalty provision is contravened, a court may make an order that the person pay a pecuniary penalty (up to a legislated maximum penalty) and/or make any other order that the court considers appropriate. Other orders that a court may make in civil proceedings include compliance and restraining orders, adverse publicity orders, monetary benefit orders. These expanded enforcement tools will provide for tailored enforcement to suit particular contraventions.

Specific transport-related orders for compensation will align with the Model Transport Act to enable road or rail authorities to receive compensation for damages to road or rail caused by or contributed to by an offender under the Act.

The Bill also provides stronger enforcement powers to capture liable officers. Officers of body corporates will have a positive duty to exercise due diligence and take reasonable steps to be informed and ensure body corporates are complying with their duties. If an officer fails in their due diligence duty, the officer commits an offence and may be subject to the natural person penalty for an offence for failing to comply with the relevant duty or obligation. An officer of a partnership or unincorporated body or association will also be required to exercise due diligence and take reasonable steps to be informed. A failure by the partnership or unincorporated body or association will not be an offence by the officer if the officer exercised their due diligence to avoid the commission of an offence.

This Bill will also provide a mechanism to redirect obligations to comply with a direction to take actions to address serious risks arising from dangerous goods to a related or associated entity where there was control, or to an officer of the body corporate, who knew or ought reasonably to have known about the circumstances that have led to the direction being issued and who have influence over the entity's compliance. This new mechanism seeks to stamp out companies phoenixing, or refusal to comply, in order to avoid responsibility for their actions.

Providing WorkSafe with adequate powers to identify non-compliance, enforce compliance and take action to address serious risks

The Bill provides WorkSafe Victoria, as the regulator of the transport of dangerous goods, with adequate powers to identify non-compliance, to act and enforce contraventions of the Act. The Bill includes provisions for the appointment of inspectors and specifies their functions and powers in relation to the transport of dangerous goods by road or rail or by a vessel on inland waters. Many of these powers are consistent with inspector powers currently provided under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, which this Act will replace, but the Bill also strengthens inspector powers in a similar manner to the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. Specifically, the Bill provides WorkSafe inspectors with an expanded power to intervene and take action to address a serious risk in circumstances where a person has refused or failed to comply, or is unable to comply in a safe manner, with a direction given by an inspector to address that serious risk. WorkSafe inspectors will also be empowered to take intervening actions where there is an immediate risk of harm to a person or the environment, or of damage to any property arising from the transport of dangerous goods. The Bill also provides a new entry power allowing an inspector to access a place if such entry is necessary to allow an inspector to exercise their power to intervene to address a serious or immediate risk near the place. While powers to intervene currently exist under the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, the Palmer Report found that they did not adequately capture the cause and scope of risks that warrant intervention. The inability to access another place when necessary to facilitate an intervention to address a serious or immediate risk was also found to limit WorkSafe's ability to take effective action.

To support WorkSafe's powers to intervene, the Bill also provides a new cost recovery mechanism which will better enable WorkSafe to recover costs of taking action from a person who is believed to have caused the circumstances that gave rise to the risk, or the occupier or previous occupier of the place where the inspector took action, or owners or possessors of the dangerous goods when the inspector took action. WorkSafe will also be able to place a charge on the property where the inspector took action and amounts are unpaid, noting that the owner may have benefited from remediation works, and may enforce the charge in certain circumstances. Impacted landlords may seek to recover as a cause of action from their tenants' who may have undertaken the unscrupulous conduct or caused the incident at the property which WorkSafe had to remediate. Ensuring WorkSafe has access to an effective cost recovery mechanism is essential to ensure that responsible parties continue to be subject to the financial consequences of their action, or inaction even when the public interest requires WorkSafe to intervene to address serious or immediate risks arising from dangerous goods.

The Bill also provides WorkSafe with powers to identify non-compliance and take action to address serious risks by enabling WorkSafe inspector powers to enter residential premises where it is reasonably believed that dangerous goods are present and a person is contravening or is about to contravene the Act or regulations.

The Bill provides for information sharing between agencies with complementary regulatory objectives by specifying additional agencies and departments with whom WorkSafe Victoria can share information.

To conclude, this Bill makes important reforms to modernise and improve the regulation of the transport of dangerous goods in Victoria. The changes in this Bill will support Victorian industry to comply with their obligations by complimenting requirements that will apply to all other activities involving dangerous goods and promoting national consistency. Importantly, they will help keep Victorians safe from incidents involving the transport of dangerous goods.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:33): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 15 April.

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026

Statement of compatibility

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (11:34): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 (the Bill).

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

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to incorporate dangerous goods laws into Occupational Health and Safety legislation and to modernise and streamline dangerous goods laws for the benefit of duty holders and the wider community. The Bill does this by making relevant amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the Act).

These amendments will affect all occupational health and safety (OHS) duty holders but primarily streamline requirements for businesses and industries which utilise dangerous goods. To the extent that changes may apply to individual persons, I will discuss the relevant human rights issues below.

Human Rights Issues

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

- the right to freedom from forced work (section 11);
- the right to privacy and reputation (section 13);
- the right to property (section 20);
- the right to a fair hearing (section 24);
- the right to be presumed innocent (section 25(1));
- the right to protection against self-incrimination (section 25(2)(k)); and
- the right not to be punished more than once (section 26).

Freedom from forced work

Section 11 of the Charter relevantly provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour. 'Forced or compulsory labour' does not include court-ordered community work as a condition of release from detention, work or service required because of an emergency threatening the Victorian community or a part of that community, or work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations.

Powers to issue directions

Clause 173 of the Bill inserts new section 120(1A) into the Act, which sets out the power for an inspector to give an oral or written direction to an occupier, person in control or last in control or possession of, dangerous goods or dangerous goods paraphernalia reasonably believed to be present at a place. The direction must be necessary to address a serious risk of harm to a person or damage to property arising from the dangerous goods or paraphernalia.

The compulsion to undertake an activity or to 'do' something as required by a direction made in accordance with new s120(1A) could potentially, if a broad view of the right was adopted, engage the right to freedom from forced work under s 11 of the Charter, specifically the prohibition on compulsory labour in s 11(2) of the Charter. This being so, I am of the view that if the right is engaged, any work required by a direction issued by an inspector would fall within the scope of the exception in s 11(3)(c) of the Charter, which provides that forced or compulsory labour does not include work or service that 'forms part of normal civil obligations'. As the directions can only be given to a person who is the occupier of a property or a person in control of dangerous goods or dangerous goods paraphernalia that pose a serious risk of harm to persons or damage to property, and have a preventative or remedial purpose, namely to stop, mitigate or remedy any risks to health or damage to property, it is likely such directions to take remedial action would constitute a normal civil obligation. This is because a person in control of a regulated item that poses public safety risks assumes duties in relation to managing those risks.

When made in circumstances where dangerous goods are posing a threat to life, the directions would also be exempt under s 11(3)(b) of the Charter which provides that work or service required because of an emergency threatening the Victorian community or part thereof do not constitute forced or compulsory labour for the purposes of s 11 of the Charter.

In the event that the exceptions in s 11(3) do not apply to the directions that may be made under new s 120(1A), and the right therefore is engaged, I am nevertheless of the view that it is not limited by the provision. The issue with the existing direction power under s 17K of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* is that the power to issue directions is limited to dangers arising from damaged and/or spilled dangerous goods and containers. However, the West Footscray warehouse fire in 2018 and the Campbellfield chemical factor fire in 2019 show that serious impacts to the community and property can be caused by other risks aside from damaged or spilled dangerous goods. Therefore, the power to issue directions needs to be broader in scope to address issues of serious risk of harm and prevent or mitigate a major chemical incident. This new power will sit alongside an existing power in the Act which allows for an inspector to give directions at workplaces if they reasonably believe that a serious risk to the health or safety of any person emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.

The key difference is that in the dangerous goods context, the extent of harm that can affect persons and property can be far reaching and impact the surrounding community, not only the workplace. The ability to direct duty holders who may lack understanding or intentionally be non-compliant, outweighs their right not to be forced to perform work. Furthermore, compliant duty holders would already be undertaking such requirements in accordance with the Act and regulations; the direction is only to align non-compliant behaviour with the expected level of compliance and to reduce serious risks of harm. As such, I consider that this additional power in the context of dangerous goods is appropriate, justified and proportionate to a legitimate aim and is therefore compatible with the right to freedom from forced work under s 11 of the Charter.

Power to require assistance

Clause 176 of the Bill amends section 121 of the Act to extend the ability to request assistance from a person who occupies a place where dangerous goods or dangerous goods paraphernalia are present, or who manages or controls a place other than a workplace.

Given that this provision requires a person to do a particular thing to assist an inspector, it may be considered as 'forced or compulsory labour' and therefore may be relevant to section 11 of the Charter. However, the type of assistance required under this provision from an occupier or a person with control of a place, is likely to be practically limited in nature (such as assisting an inspector to gain access to an area, open doors that require security assistance and show inspectors particular areas on site). Further, the requirement to assist an inspector may fall within the internal qualification at s 11(3)(c) being a 'normal civil obligation' and therefore not constitute a limit on the right.

Insofar as this assistance can be considered 'forced or compulsory labour' under s 11 of the Charter, any limitation on this right would be both minor and temporary and would not be of a nature that could constitute an unreasonable limit of this right.

Right to privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have that person's privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with; and not to have that person's reputation unlawfully attacked.

Interferences with privacy will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will not be 'arbitrary' if it is not capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable in the particular circumstances, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Entry into residential premises

Clause 146 of the Bill inserts new s 98(5) sets out the power to enter residential premises with the consent of the occupier, or in circumstances where an inspector reasonably believes dangerous goods are present at that place and a person at the residential premises is contravening or is about to contravene the Act or the regulations. This entry power is based upon the premise that there is an underlying level of risk of harm which occurs from contraventions of the Act or regulations, especially when the breach involves dangerous goods given that they are inherently risky.

I consider the framework of the new residential entry power to appropriately balance personal privacy against protection of the wider community from dangerous goods which have unique physical risks such as explosive or other dangerous characteristics, and which can have far reaching consequences. To enter without consent, inspectors must have, a reasonable belief that dangerous goods are present at the residential premises and a person at the residential premises is contravening or about to contravene the Act or regulations. The power is confined to circumstances of urgency where a contravention is occurring or about to occur – and will not permit entry to investigate past contraventions of the Act or regulations, which will require a warrant or occupier consent to enter.

Clause 146 of the Bill also inserts new s98(6) into the Act which provides an inspector with the ability to enter a place near a property where an inspector reasonably believes a serious risk or an immediate risk of harm to a person or property damage is present, to take necessary action to address the risk. For example, it may be necessary to physically traverse through a property to get to the incident site to prevent or reduce harm.

Legislative safeguards set out under new s 98(7) reduce the impact of any interference upon occupiers' enjoyment of their property. This includes the need for an inspector to give immediate notice of entry, to enter at a reasonable time and to take reasonable steps to obtain consent from an occupier of a residential premises.

As such, a range of safeguards apply to ensure the powers may only be exercised in a reasonable and proportionate way that protects the privacy of individuals as much as possible. The powers serve the important purpose of enabling inspectors to address serious risks of harm caused by the presence or misuse of dangerous goods. Although the powers involve some interference with the privacy, particularly of persons present or residential premises, I consider that the interference is proportionate to the legitimate aim of protecting public health, and is neither unlawful nor arbitrary and is therefore compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Incidental powers of entry

Section 99 of the Act currently provides inspectors with a broad range of powers on entry such as an ability to inspect, examine, bring equipment, take photographs or seize things for evidential or testing purposes to enable the exercise of powers under the Act or regulations. In doing so, an inspector may interfere with a persons' privacy or correspondence by accessing, inspecting documents and/or taking samples or copies on premises.

Minor amendments are made to section 99 through clause 147, which will modernise and clarify the language used. For example, 'seize and remove' will replace the term 'seize' to explicitly state that a thing may be removed. Inspectors will also be empowered to examine, copy or take extracts from a document or seize, make audio, video or any other type of recording, take measurements or make sketches, and remove any substance or other thing for testing, if they reasonably believe that examination or testing in reasonably necessary and cannot be conducted on site.

These amendments will apply to all entry powers, including those specific to dangerous goods.

Clause 147 includes additional safeguards such as a requirements to give a written record of the seizure and removal as soon as possible to the occupier of the place, minimise disruption and only remain there as long as reasonably necessary.

In my view, the amendments effected by clause 147 are minor in nature and do not, or only minimally, extend the interference on a person's right to privacy that already exists under the Act. Rather, the provisions seek to modify and update the language.

To the extent that the amendments to the incidental powers of entry do interfere with a person's privacy rights, they appropriately balance a person's right to privacy with the need for the regulator to ascertain and investigate OHS and dangerous goods breaches and are reasonably required to ensure compliance with health and safety in relation to dangerous goods. I am of the view that they are proportionate and appropriately justified in my view such that they are compatible with the right to privacy under the Charter.

Powers to collect samples

Clause 149 amends section 101(1) of the Act to enable an inspector to require an occupier or apparent occupier to give them samples of any thing at the place that may require analysis, and includes an offence provision for non-compliance. Currently, the Act allows an inspector to take a sample, but not to compel a person to provide a sample. This expands the interference with a person's privacy; however, I am of the view that any such impact is minimal, the sample taking is for analysis only, and is proportionate to the purpose of the limitation, which is to protect public health in the context of dangerous goods. The provision is also subject to the notification safeguards and requirements of section 101(3). I am therefore content that clause 149 is compatible with the right to privacy.

Power to make inquiries following certain incidents

Given the risks to health and safety associated with dangerous goods, there is a power provided for in clause 150 for an inspector to make any necessary inquiries into certain incidents, such as where a fire or explosion results in the death of or injury to a person, property damage or public danger from the presence of dangerous goods. For the purpose of making such an inquiry, an inspector may enter any place.

This power mirror similar powers of incident inquiry currently provided by section 13E of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*. Whilst a power of entry may interfere with the privacy rights of the person whose property or business it is, on balance, any such interference is considered justified and appropriate given the serious nature of the incident which has taken place. Inquiring into the incident, as necessary, may help understand the cause and prevent reoccurrences or future events. Accordingly, I consider that clause 150 is compatible with the right to privacy.

Power for the inspector to intervene

Where a person who has been given a direction under new s 120(1A) fails to carry out the direction, or is unlikely to safely comply with it, the Bill provides an inspector with a subsequent power to intervene by taking action to address the serious risk before harm eventuates (clause 173, which inserts new ss 120A to 120I into the Act). These new provisions also allow an inspector to intervene without the issue of a direction if the inspector reasonably believes that there is an immediate risk of harm to any person or of property damage arising from the presence of dangerous goods. Under new s 120A(2), a higher threshold of risk is required to intervene without the issue of a preceding direction. For example, if an inspector observes flammable dangerous goods stored near an active heat source in a well-ventilated area. Given the immediate risk of fire an inspector may use their power to intervene to take immediate action to stop operations and evacuate the area.

The intervention power is contingent upon a high level of risk and therefore a need to act to prevent the eventuation of harm to persons or property. Given there will generally be opportunity for a person who is issued a direction to address a serious risk themselves, any interference with their right to privacy occasioned by this provision is expected to be minimal, particularly as new s 120A(3) provides that the intervention provisions do not apply in relation to residential premises. Accordingly, any intervention would presumably occur in a workplace or some other area where a reduced expectation of personal privacy exists, and would be less likely to interfere with a person's private sphere.

However, to the extent that clause 173 does interfere with a person's right to privacy, I consider that the importance of preventing harm from dangerous goods incidents outweighs any such interference, such that any limit on the right is reasonable and demonstrably justifiable and appropriate in the circumstances. I am therefore content that clause 173 is compatible with the right to privacy.

Power to issue notices

Clauses 165 to 167 of the Bill insert new Part 9.8 into the Act, amending current Part 9 Division 8 of the Act to expand the existing power of an inspector to issue various notices in relation to dangerous goods. Relevantly, clause 167 expands the power to issue a prohibition notice to circumstances where an inspector believes an activity is occurring, or may occur, at a place that involves or will involve a serious risk to the health or safety of any person or a serious risk of property damage emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to dangerous goods. Accordingly, clause 167 engages the right to privacy by prohibiting a person from undertaking a particular activity on their private property or at their workplace.

I am of the view, however, that these powers are lawful and not arbitrary as inspectors would issue the prohibition notice pursuant to a properly circumscribed law employing an appropriately high threshold

(requiring a 'serious risk' to health, safety or property emanating from 'immediate or imminent' exposure to dangerous goods). The purpose of the notices is to further the important aim of protecting persons and property from harm or damage, particularly in the context of the presence of dangerous goods. The prohibition notice ceases to have effect upon the inspector certifying in writing that the matters giving rise to the risk have been remedied.

Accordingly, I am of the view that the issue of prohibition notices are lawful and not arbitrary, and so do not limit the right to privacy under the Charter.

Information sharing and publication

Clause 22 inserts new section 11A to the Act to enable the Authority to share information proactively with a wider cohort of persons or bodies, reducing complexity in sharing information and supporting a coordinated inter-agency response towards non-compliance with OHS laws.

The Authority will be able to rely upon the new s 11A to share information with certain persons or bodies including the Coroners Court, Director of Public Prosecutions, councils, fire authorities and law enforcement agencies if the Authority reasonably believes it is in the public interest or necessary for the Authority's exercise of powers or functions, or necessary for collaboration or to eliminate or reduce serious risks to health, safety or property.

While this provision will promote information sharing and reduce opportunities for rogue operators to fall out of line-sight where there are two or more regulators who share remit, the disclosure of information by the Authority may interfere with privacy rights. However, I do not consider that the right will be limited, because the information shared is unlikely to include sensitive, personal or health information, and is for a limited and specific purpose including to protect public health and safety and to enable a more proactive regulatory approach across government and other bodies. Existing legislative safeguards in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* will continue to protect the integrity of information sharing practices. Accordingly, should privacy rights of individuals be limited by the information sharing provisions in the Bill, I consider that any limit will be reasonable and demonstrably justified under s 7(2) of the Charter.

In my view, therefore, clause 22 and the expansion of the Authority's functions are compatible with the right to privacy under the Charter.

Adverse Publicity Orders

Clause 197 enables Adverse Publicity Orders to be issued in relation to dangerous goods. The aim is to provide the regulator with a range of orders which can be made in addition to, or instead of, another penalty type imposed by the Court.

The provision will grant the court discretion to make an adverse publicity order having found a person guilty of an offence. The order may require an offender to publicise the offence or contravention, its consequences, the penalty imposed and any related matter, and/or to notify a specified person of the offence or contravention and its consequences. The offender must then give the Authority evidence of their compliance with the order. Failure to do so, or do so adequately, enables the Authority to take the relevant actions specified in the adverse publicity notice, including publicising the offender's offence and penalty. Clause 197 provides that there are protections enshrined which will require that the court not to make an adverse publicity order unless satisfied that the costs of complying with the order do not exceed the maximum penalty amount that the court may impose on the offender for the offence concerned.

These provisions may give rise to the publication of the identity of individuals and their convictions under the Act and thereby may impact negatively upon the reputation of those individuals, and interfere with their right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked under s 13(b) of the Charter. However, I consider that any interference with the right to privacy and reputation resulting from these provisions will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. Adverse publicity orders will be made by a court pursuant to properly circumscribed legislation and are a proportionate measure aimed at notifying the public about operators who are non-compliant with health and safety legislation in respect of the transport of dangerous goods.

In my view, it is appropriate and reasonable in the circumstances that there is a power to name persons and detail conduct by way of Adverse Publicity Order as it serves the purposes of promoting accountability and transparency as to non-compliance and reflects important public policy. It may also help to deter other similar duty holders in the dangerous goods transport industry. I therefore consider that clause 197 is compatible with the right to privacy and reputation under the Charter.

Further, an adverse publicity order may only be made following conviction for an offence, with the associated safeguards of principles of justice and procedural fairness applying to the exercise of judicial discretion and the court process. Further, information in respect of a court order is likely to be on the public record in any event due to the judicial proceedings.

Property rights

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

Powers to impose a charge on land

Clause 173 will insert new sections 120A to 120H, into the Act. As outlined above, s120A will allow an inspector to take any action considered necessary by the inspector to address a serious risk set out in a direction if the direction is not complied with, or unlikely to be safely complied with, by the person to whom the direction was issued. It also empowers an inspector to act if she or he reasonably believes there is an immediate risk of harm to persons or property from dangerous goods.

Under section 120B, the Authority will be able to issue a costs notice to a person whom the Authority reasonably believes caused the circumstances which led to the inspector's intervention, as well as to an occupier, or previous occupier, of the relevant place.

New s 120C then allows the Authority to commence legal proceedings to seek to recover the remediation costs specified in a costs notice if a person to whom a notice has been issued does not pay within the relevant time period.

Section 120E then enables a charge to be imposed on the land on which the inspector took the intervention action if the costs notice is unpaid at the end of the relevant payment period, and the Authority has followed the required procedure for advertising. The Authority can require land to be registered under the *Transfer of Land Act 1958* to better protect the Authority's security. Safeguards under section 106B of the *Transfer of Land Act 1958* apply to the imposition of the charge and removal thereof, requiring the Authority to comply with such requirements.

Given a charge on land may restrict or prevent the transfer of that land, section 120E may therefore be relevant to property rights under s 20 of the Charter. However, the charge would be imposed pursuant to a properly circumscribed law in order to facilitate the recovery of remediation costs incurred due to a breach of OHS law. Therefore, in my view, any interference with a land owner's property rights occasioned by section 120E will be in accordance with the law and such that the provision is compatible with s 20 of the Charter.

Sale of land to recover debt

New s120G then provides the Authority with the power to enforce a charge imposed on the land under new s 120E by selling the land, if the charge has existed for at least 12 months and the court has made an order requiring payment and payment has not been made.

The sale of property to recover remediation costs will deprive the relevant property owner of that property, and may interfere with their property rights under s 20 of the Charter. However, I am content that the right is not limited by new s 120G because the deprivation of property would be pursuant to law in order to cover debts incurred in remediating breaches in respect of dangerous goods. Judicial oversight of costs enforcement proceedings and the requirement for a court order before land can be sold safeguards property rights, such that the provision strikes an appropriate balance between the rights of the affected parties and enabling the Authority to recover outstanding debts and properly administer its compliance and enforcement regime in respect of dangerous goods. I am therefore of the view that new s120G is compatible with the right to property under the Charter.

Forfeiture of seized property

There are existing return and forfeiture provisions with respect to seized property under sections 108 and 109 of the Act. These relate to a thing or document, and set out the parameters for the return of seized things and when appropriate, their forfeiture.

Clause 161 of the Bill amends s 109 to extend forfeiture to circumstances where the Authority considers it necessary to retain the thing to prevent the commission of an offence against the Act or the *Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2025*, or accompanying regulations.

The *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* also has similar provisions for things other than high consequence dangerous goods or explosives or their containers. This Bill seeks to incorporate provisions from the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* relating to seizure and forfeiture of specific types of dangerous goods, being high consequence dangerous goods, explosives and their containers.

Clause 162 inserts new ss 109A and 109B which are specific to the return and forfeiture of seized things such as high consequence dangerous goods, explosives and containers. Under this provision, the Authority is required to return the thing to its owner immediately where retention is no longer necessary, unless forfeited to the Authority under s 109 of the Act. If not immediately returned or forfeited, then the Authority must

return it within 12 months of seizure or as soon as possible after a proceeding and appeal has concluded. However, the Authority is not permitted to return it to a person unauthorised under the Act to possess the thing or not required to return it if the Authority cannot locate or return it to the owner. New s 109B allows for the forfeiture of certain goods such as SSAN, explosives and containers used in connection with these items, where the owner cannot be found, is unknown, or where the items cannot be returned despite reasonable efforts.

While the forfeiture of goods can interfere with property rights, I am of the view that the interference is lawful, being pursuant to properly circumscribed legislation in circumstances where the goods have and may still pose a risk to public safety, and where efforts have been made to locate the owner and return the goods. Accordingly, I consider that clauses 161 and 162 are compatible with the right to property under the Charter.

Forfeiture and disposal order

Clause 198 enables various entities to seek an order from the Magistrates' Court for forfeiture and disposal of SSAN, explosives or containers before a conviction. There are certain requirements including that the Court must be satisfied that unless forfeited or destroyed there is a reasonable likelihood that a contravention or the Act or offence against this Act or another, will occur. Special provision for this is required given that the storage of these specific dangerous goods may expose the Authority's workers to higher safety risks. In cases where seized explosives are unknown, they may well be past their expiration date and unstable, making it riskier for WorkSafe's magazine keeper to store the explosives. Explosives and high consequence dangerous goods can also be costly for the Authority to retain given they require strict procedures and security measures for their storage.

While clause 198 may interfere with the owners' property rights, I am of the view that there is no limit on s 20, as the forfeiture of property is in accordance with the law, overseen by the Magistrates Court and is a proportionate measure to ensure public safety in the context of dangerous goods.

Right to a fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter recognises a right to a fair hearing so that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

Rights of appeal process to Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)

Section 10A of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 enables the Authority's administrative decisions to be reviewable by Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) without a prior internal review.

The Bill will not replicate this right to a merits review from VCAT in relation to directions and step-in powers used by inspectors in relation to dangerous goods. Reviews will be limited to judicial review only. This will maintain a pathway to ensure inspectors are acting within their legal authority; but removes an alternative decision outcome based upon a merits review from VCAT.

The removal of the right to apply to VCAT for review of directions and step-in powers decisions of the Authority is relevant to the right to fair hearing under s 24(1) of the Charter, which utilises a broad concept of 'civil proceeding' that encompasses administrative decision-makers with powers to determine private rights and interests. While recognising the broad scope of s 24(1), the term 'proceeding' and 'party' suggest that s 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties. As many of the decisions here (directions and step-in powers) do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, there is a question as to whether the right to a fair hearing is engaged. In any event, I will proceed to discuss the impact on fair hearing in the event a broad reading of s 24(1) is adopted.

While the opportunity to be heard by an independent tribunal on merits review has now been removed, an affected person will still ultimately have the right of judicial review.

To the extent, however that fair hearing rights are limited, in that an applicant is not afforded a right to merits review before an independent tribunal in relation to a decision which affects their private rights, I am satisfied that the limits are reasonable and justified in the circumstances in accordance with s 7(2) of the Charter. This is because the powers to issue a direction and to intervene are based upon a risk assessment at a point in time and by an officer with technical expertise in assessing dangerous goods. In my view, this type of decision is not suited to a merits review by a generalist tribunal such as VCAT which lacks the necessary technical expertise to make an informed decision. The VCAT process can also cause significant delays to exercising powers in instances of serious or immediate risk that require an urgent response. I consider that the removal of merits reviews in VCAT, while have the potential to engage the right to a fair hearing, appropriately balances this interference with rights with the need to take urgent action in the face of serious risks to public health and safety.

Accordingly, I am content that removal of this mechanism is still compatible with the right to fair hearing under s 24 of the Charter.

Right to be presumed innocent

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

Reasonable or lawful excuse offence provision

The following clauses insert offences which contain a 'reasonable excuse' or 'lawful excuse' exception:

- Clause 55 (new section 35D) – Duty to not recklessly engage in activities involving the handling of dangerous goods that places another person in danger of serious injury or death.
- Clause 149 – Failure or refusal to comply with giving an inspector samples.
- Clause 165 – Failure to comply with a non-disturbance notice
- Clause 172 – Failure or refusal to comply with a direction.
- Clause 176 (new section 121(1)–(4)) – Failure to provide assistance to an inspector
- Clause 179 (new sections 124B(3) and 124C(3)) – Failure for a person to comply with a modified section 120 direction.

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

Accordingly, I am of the view that the above clauses are compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence under s 25(1) of the Charter.

Presumptions in criminal proceedings

Clause 194 inserts new section 133A which sets out matters that, when provided in evidence by an inspector in criminal matters, are presumed to be factual. For example, section 133A(a) provides that, in a proceeding for an offence, where an inspector gives evidence that they suspected that dangerous goods were involved in an offence and provides evidence of the grounds of their suspicion, and the court considers that suspicion is reasonable, the particular dangerous goods are taken to have been involved in the offence unless contrary evidence is provided. Subsections (b)–(d) provide similar provisions for other evidence that is provided by an inspector.

Section 25(1) is not engaged where there is an evidential burden as opposed to a persuasive burden. To avoid doubt, clause 194 places an evidential burden on the accused by requiring them to raise evidence to rebut the prima facie evidence. However, the legal burden of proof for the matter overall continues to remain with the Authority who must prove the elements of the offence. If the accused provides evidence that rebuts the prima facie evidence, the evidential burden shifts back to the prosecution to lead evidence which proves the allegation. Noting this, the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter is not engaged or limited.

Forfeiture and disposal order

Before making a forfeiture and disposal order under new section 135C (inserted by clause 198), subsection (3) requires the Magistrates' Court to be satisfied that there is a reasonable likelihood that, if the order is not made, the SSAN, explosives or container used for the transport of the same will be used in connection with a contravention of the Act or regulations or any other Act. The court must also be satisfied that the Order is in the interests of public safety.

When making an order, subsection (4) also provides for the Magistrates' Court to include findings of fact as to the quantity or nature of dangerous goods to include in a forfeiture and disposal order. A finding of fact can subsequently be produced in proceedings and as provided under subsection (5) will be prima facie evidence of the matter to which the finding relates.

The prima facie evidence status of a finding of fact in such an order is relevant to the right to presumption of innocence under s 25(1) because it places an evidential burden for the accused by requiring them to raise evidence to the contrary. It does not transfer the legal burden of proof. If evidence sufficient to rebut the prima

facie evidence is raised by the defendant, the evidential burden shifts back to the prosecution to lead evidence which supports the finding of fact.

I do not consider that the prima facie evidence status of an order issued under clause 198 limits the right to be presumed innocent, and clause 198 of the Bill is therefore compatible with this right.

Right to protection against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled without discrimination to (amongst other things) not be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Production of documents

Section 9 of the Act currently empowers the Authority to require a person to provide information or produce a document in their control to enable the Authority to ascertain compliance with the Act or regulations.

Clause 19 of the Bill will make a minor change to this to align section 9 with section 154 of the Act to make it clear that refusal or failure to give information on the basis that it would tend to incriminate the person may be evoked only in relation to information under section 9(1)(a) and not the production of documents.

Section 154 of the Act allows a natural person to refuse to, or fail to, give information or do any other thing that the person is required to do by or under the Act or the regulations if to do so would tend to incriminate the person, however not in relation to the production of a document (or part thereof) or the giving of a person's name or address in accordance with section 119.

Section 9 and section 154 affirm the right to protection against self-incrimination in relation to provision of information. However, to the extent that the Authority can compel the production of a pre-existing document, there may be an interference with the right against self-incrimination under s 25(2)(k).

At common law, the High Court has held that the protection accorded to pre-existing documents is considerably weaker than that accorded to oral testimony or to documents that are brought into existence to comply with a request for information. The compulsion to produce pre-existing documents that speak for themselves is in strong contrast to testimonial oral or written evidence that is brought into existence as a direct response to questions. This is particularly so in the context of a regulated industry or subject matter (such as dangerous goods), where documents or records are required to be produced during the course of a person's participation in that industry or engagement with that regulated subject matter, and are brought into existence for the dominant purpose of demonstrating that person's compliance with relevant duties and obligations when inspected. This is particularly justified where the main purpose of the regulation is to protect the public and prevent harm to persons and property in relation to the transport of dangerous goods.

The duty to provide documents in this context is consistent with the reasonable expectations of persons who are engaging within a regulated scheme and assuming the responsibilities and duties that apply to a person's manufacture, storage, transport, transfer, sale and use of dangerous goods. To provide for a full document-use immunity would unreasonably obstruct the role of inspectors and the accountability aims of the record-keeping obligations, as well as give the holders of such documents an unfair forensic advantage in relation to criminal and civil penalty investigations. Accordingly, any protection afforded to documentary material by the privilege is limited in scope and not as fundamental to the nature of the right as the protection against the requirement that verbal answers be provided. A further safeguard is provided excusing the disclosure of any information the subject of client legal privilege.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that this is compatible with the protection of self-incrimination afforded under s 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which that person has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy. However the principle only applies in respect of criminal offences – it will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa.

The civil penalty regime introduced by clause 183 of the Bill may interfere with a person's right not to be punished more than once given the proposed parallel operation of the civil penalty regime with the criminal law. The new civil penalty regime is modelled on the *Environment Protection Act 2017* which provides that a person cannot be given a civil penalty order if a person has been convicted of an offence constituting the same conduct.

New section 126AF will provide that the Court must not make a civil penalty order against a person who has been convicted of an offence constituted by substantially the same conduct. New section 126AG will provide that civil proceedings for contravention of a civil penalty provision must be stayed if criminal proceedings are brought for an offence constituted by substantially the same conduct that is alleged to constitute the civil penalty contravention. These provisions seek to protect against concurrent civil and criminal proceedings for conduct that is substantially the same. However, if a person is not convicted of the criminal offence, new s 126AG(2)(a) provides that civil penalty proceedings may be resumed.

New s 126AH enables criminal proceedings to be brought against a person regardless of whether a civil penalty order has been made for conduct that is substantially the same as the conduct constituting the offence. Accordingly, a person may receive a civil penalty and then have a subsequent criminal sanction imposed upon a conviction for the same conduct, which is relevant to the protection against double punishment. Whether the right is limited in this context will depend on whether the civil penalty is of such nature and magnitude to constitute truly penal consequences. In my view, the civil penalties for breaching the relevant provisions would not be considered to be punitive, or in effect, criminal sanctions. Although some of the maximum pecuniary penalties are up to 2000 penalty units, the purpose of the civil penalties is to encourage regulatory compliance, which is necessary due to the serious risks of harm to human health that may arise from a contravention of the Act. A civil penalty order will be enforceable as a judgment debt and a person will not be liable to be imprisoned for a failure to discharge the debt.

While I do not consider that clause 183 limits s 26 of the Charter, to the extent that right may be limited, if a court should consider that the larger civil penalties do constitute punishment, I am of the view that the limit is reasonable and justified in the circumstances. This approach mirrors the 'pyramid of sanctions' model of enforcement employed by comparative regulatory schemes in other jurisdictions. This model is predicated on findings that implementing a bar against the use of both criminal and civil proceedings can undermine effective enforcement. Civil penalty proceedings can be more efficient in enforcing the scheme and deterring misconduct due to the lower burden of proof, streamlined procedure, availability of negotiated settlements and lower costs. However, civil penalties alone can be an insufficient deterrent in relation to the more serious and harmful misconduct which warrant criminal punishment. Criminal sanctions are directed at appropriate punishment and serve as a greater deterrent. A criminal conviction poses much more reputational risks for a defendant, with bad publicity and stigma of a conviction far outweighing the label attached to an adverse decision in civil proceedings and/or the making of civil penalty orders. The availability to commence criminal proceedings notwithstanding whether a civil penalty has been imposed is an important part of the pyramidal structure of enforcement of sanctions for more serious cases, while still providing for effective and efficient deterrence.

The Bill implements sufficient safeguards to protect criminal process rights, including deeming any information and documents produced by an individual in a proceeding for a contravention order to be inadmissible in a criminal proceeding concerning substantially the same conduct. Further, the Bill does not interfere with existing sentencing discretions, including a sentencing judge's consideration of the principle of totality and rule against double punishment in relation to imposing a criminal sanction for substantially the same conduct already subject to a civil contravention order.

Accordingly, I consider that clause 183 of the Bill is compatible with the right not to be tried or punished more than once as set out in s 26 of the Charter.

Rights in criminal proceedings

Section 25(1) of the Charter sets out that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law and section 25(2) provides for minimum guarantees relating to prompt information about the offence and appropriate defence opportunities, amongst other things.

Power to redirect certain body corporate obligations

Clause 179 of the Bill will adopt a new power for the Authority to issue a notice to redirect certain body corporate obligations to appropriate officers of the body corporate or other persons to whom a notice was issued. These provisions may be relevant to the presumption of innocence to the extent that they may operate to deem an individual liable for the actions of the body corporate that are indictable offences and carry criminal penalties (being a failure to comply with a non-disturbance notice, improvement notice or prohibition notice).

However, to the extent that this results in a limit on the right, I consider the limit reasonably justified. The power serves an important and legitimate purpose. The power will ensure obligations follow responsible individuals who might reasonably be said to bear some responsibility for the non-compliance. It would ensure that bodies corporates cannot avoid accountability by going into liquidation or phoenixing to avoid obligations and allow the Authority to continue to prosecute the responsible party for non-compliance.

In my view, it is appropriate to transfer obligations under the Bill to officers, and to make principals liable for the conduct of the body corporate and its employees and agents, in order to ensure proper compliance with the relevant OHS schemes and to protect public health and safety. A person who elects to undertake a position as an officer of a body corporate accepts that they will be subject to certain requirements and duties, including a duty to ensure that the body corporate complies with its legal obligations, and does not commit offences. Affected persons should be well aware of the regulatory requirements and, as such, should have the necessary processes and systems in place to effectively meet these requirements and not incur accessorial liability.

In terms of the extent of the limitation, the power is conditional on the Authority being satisfied of a number of mandatory elements with a relatively high threshold, including that the person knew or ought reasonably to have known of the circumstances that resulting the issuing of the specified notice, was in a position to influence the body corporate in relation to its compliance with the specified notice, and, in the case of a failure to comply, and that it would not be oppressive, unjust or unreasonable for the Authority to issue the officer the redirection notice. In being satisfied of the last matter, being that the redirection notice was not oppressive, unjust or unreasonable, the Authority will relevantly need to take into account human rights under the Charter, including the presumption of innocence.

Finally, the prosecution would still be required to prove each element of an offence, and any burden placed on an officer (such as to establish an applicable reasonable excuse defence) would be evidential only. In my view, there are no less restrictive means reasonably available for ensuring adequate deterrence for bodies corporate for breaches of OHS requirements in respect of dangerous good that may cause significant public harm.

Accordingly, I am satisfied that these provisions are compatible with the right under the Charter to the presumption of innocence.

The Hon Ben Carroll MP
Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC

Second reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (11:35): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill gives effect to reforms that will improve safety for the Victorian community by modernising the regulation of dangerous goods and strengthening WorkSafe's ability to enforce compliance with dangerous goods laws.

Dangerous goods are chemicals that carry inherent risks to persons or property, such as goods that are corrosive, flammable, combustible, explosive, oxidising or have other hazardous properties.

Dangerous goods are an integral part of our economy and are used across industries including agriculture, construction, manufacturing and healthcare to provide services and produce essential goods such as cleaning products, food, fertiliser, fuel, plastics and paint.

However, dangerous goods also present significant risks that need to be controlled. When they are not dealt with safely, dangerous goods can result in incidents exposing Victorian workers, emergency service personnel and the wider community to risks of harm to their health, safety and property. Dangerous goods also include explosives and security sensitive ammonium nitrate which present security risks to the Victorian community.

The changes in this Bill deliver on the Victorian Government's commitment to implement legislative reforms recommended in the *Final Report of the Independent Review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and associated regulations* by Andrew Palmer KC, now Judge Palmer (Palmer Report) which was released in October 2022.

The Victorian Government commissioned this Independent Review in response to the major chemical fires that occurred in suburban Melbourne in 2018 and 2019 as a result of illegal stockpiling of chemicals. These fires released significant amounts of toxic smoke and dangerous chemicals, affecting nearby communities. The Independent Reviewer was asked to identify opportunities to strengthen laws and help prevent such significant incidents from occurring again.

The Palmer Report found that the current dangerous goods regulatory framework is outdated, difficult to navigate and inconsistent with other regulatory frameworks dangerous goods duty holders are required to

comply with. The Independent Reviewer also considered that this is likely contributing to non-compliance and illegal activity as unscrupulous operators take advantage of weaknesses in regulation and regulatory oversight. To address these findings the Palmer Report made 49 recommendations. This Bill and the associated Dangerous Goods Transport Bill deliver legislative change required to address 24 recommendations agreed to in full or in-principle by the Victorian Government.

I will now address the key amendments in more detail.

Incorporating dangerous goods laws into workplace safety laws

As its core recommendation, the Palmer Report called for foundational structural reform to bring dangerous goods laws into alignment with the structure, concepts and language of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

In giving effect to this recommendation, the Bill will streamline and modernise Victoria's dangerous goods laws by incorporating the regulation of dangerous goods into existing occupational health and safety legislation. This will make it easier for duty holders to understand and comply with their dangerous goods obligations as almost all dangerous goods duty holders also have obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

The Bill amends the objects of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to secure and seek to eliminate risks to the health and safety of persons and prevent damage to property in relation to the handling of dangerous goods.

A duties-based approach will modernise dangerous goods regulation

The Bill modernises the regulation of dangerous goods by introducing a broad general duty requiring a person involved in the handling of dangerous goods to ensure dangerous goods are handled in a manner that is safe and without risks to health, safety and property. Broad, principle-based duties shift the focus of duty holders from compliance with prescriptive obligations to the proactive identification, management and review of risks. General duties are also a familiar feature of Victoria's regulatory landscape with Victorian industry already being subject to duties-based-regulation in the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and the Environment Protection Act 2017.

The Bill also provides for the new dangerous goods general duty to be supported by regulations, Compliance Codes and non-statutory guidance for duty holders. These will provide duty holders with further information about how the dangerous goods general duty should be performed and will promote continued improvements to the state of knowledge about how to ensure the safety of activities involving the handling of dangerous goods.

Strengthened enforcement, prosecution and penalties

An effective regulatory framework also requires an effective enforcement system comprising a range of enforcement options that are flexible enough to deter the full range of non-compliant behaviour.

Accordingly, contravention of the new dangerous goods general duty will be subject to significant maximum penalties of 2,000 penalty units for a natural person and 10,000 penalty units for a body corporate. The Bill also introduces new offences for an aggravated breach of the new dangerous goods general duty and for a person who recklessly engages in the handling of dangerous goods that places, or may place, another person in danger of serious injury or death. These offences will apply to circumstances where the conduct of the offender represents a higher degree of culpability than other offences in the Act. An aggravated breach will be subject to higher maximum penalties of 4,000 penalty units, 5 years imprisonment or both for a natural person and 20,000 penalty units for a body corporate. The recklessness offence will be subject to maximum penalties of 5,000 penalty units, 10 years imprisonment or both for a natural person or 40,000 penalty units for a body corporate.

The Bill also expands the enforcement tools that can be used to address breaches across a range of dangerous goods and occupational health and safety offences. This includes the introduction of civil penalties provisions which will offer alternative legal proceedings where criminal prosecution is not warranted. Where a civil penalty provision is contravened a court may make an order that the person pay a pecuniary penalty (up to a legislated maximum penalty) and/or make any other order that the court considers appropriate. Other orders that a court may make in civil proceedings include compliance and restraining orders, adverse publicity orders, monetary benefit orders, orders to undertake improvement projects and an order of release on the giving of a health and safety undertaking. These expanded enforcement tools will provide for tailored enforcement to suit particular contraventions. Court orders will also enable WorkSafe to seek an order from the court requiring a duty holder, licence holder or permit holder to take specified actions or restrain from taking specified actions to ensure compliance with the Act. Such an order can be sought regardless of whether civil or criminal proceedings have been initiated against the duty holder, licence holder or permit holder.

The Bill also provides stronger enforcement powers to capture liable officers. Officers of body corporates will have a positive duty to exercise due diligence and take reasonable steps to be informed and ensure body corporates are complying with their duties. If an officer fails in their due diligence duty, the officer commits an offence and may be subject to the natural person penalty for an offence for failing to comply with the relevant duty or obligation. An officer of a partnership or unincorporated body or association will also be required to exercise due diligence and take reasonable steps to be informed. A failure by the partnership or unincorporated body or association will not be an offence by the officer if the officer exercised their due diligence to avoid the commission of an offence.

This Bill will also provide a mechanism to redirect obligations to comply with a direction to take actions to address serious risks arising from dangerous goods to a related or associated entity or to an officer of a body corporate. This can occur where the related or associated entity or officer knew or ought reasonably to have known about the circumstances that have led to the direction being issued and who had influence over the entity's compliance with the direction. This new mechanism seeks to stamp out companies "phoenixing", or refusing to comply, in order to avoid responsibility for their actions.

The Palmer Report's recommendations to expand enforcement tools were made with respect to dangerous goods; however, the incorporation of dangerous goods regulation into the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 has also required the Victorian Government to consider if these changes should also apply to the occupational health and safety regulatory framework. Accordingly, civil penalty provisions and the associated orders will also be introduced for contraventions of occupational health and safety provisions. A new offence for an aggravated breach of an employer's duty to employees under section 21 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act will also be introduced to align with the offence for an aggravated breach of the new dangerous goods general duty.

The Bill also increases the maximum infringement penalty under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* to align with the amounts outlined in the *Attorney General's Guidelines to the Infringements Act 2006*. Currently maximum infringement penalties are 12 penalty units for an individual and 60 penalty units for a body corporate. This will apply across both the dangerous goods and occupational health and safety frameworks and will ensure that penalties for infringement offences can be set at an amount that will achieve deterrence.

Strengthening WorkSafe's powers to take action to address serious risks and share information about dangerous goods

The Palmer Report also noted that WorkSafe requires adequate powers to intervene when non-compliance presents a serious risk to the Victorian community and made several recommendations to improve WorkSafe's capacity to enter places, give directions and take intervening action in relation to dangerous goods.

The Bill addresses these recommendations by expanding a WorkSafe inspector's power to intervene and take action to address a serious risk in circumstances where a person has refused or failed to comply, or is unable to comply in a safe manner, with a direction given by an inspector to address that serious risk. WorkSafe inspectors will also be empowered to take intervening actions where there is an immediate risk of harm to a person or damage to any property arising from the presence of dangerous goods. The Bill also provides a new entry power allowing an inspector to access a place if such entry is necessary to allow an inspector to exercise their power to intervene to address a serious or immediate risk near the place. While powers to intervene currently exist under the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, the Palmer Report found that they did not adequately capture the cause and scope of risks that warrant intervention. The inability to access another place when necessary to facilitate an intervention to address a serious or immediate risk was also found to limit WorkSafe's ability to take effective action.

To support WorkSafe's powers to intervene, the Bill also provides a new cost recovery mechanism which will better enable WorkSafe to recover costs of taking action from a person who is believed to have caused the circumstances that gave rise to the risk or the occupier or previous occupier, of the place where the inspector took action. WorkSafe will also be able to place a charge on the property where the inspector took action and amounts are unpaid, noting that the owner may have benefited from remediation works, and may enforce the charge in certain circumstances. Impacted landlords may seek to recover as a cause of action from their tenants' who may have undertaken the unscrupulous conduct or caused the incident at the property which WorkSafe had to remediate. Ensuring WorkSafe has access to an effective cost recovery mechanism is essential to ensure that responsible parties continue to be subject to the financial consequences of their action, or inaction even when the public interest requires WorkSafe to intervene to address serious or immediate risks arising from dangerous goods.

The Bill also provides WorkSafe with increased powers to identify non-compliance and take action to address serious risks by expanding WorkSafe inspector powers to enter residential premises where it is reasonably

believed that dangerous goods are present and a person is contravening or is about to contravene the Act or regulations.

The Bill provides for improved information sharing between agencies with complementary regulatory objectives by specifying additional agencies and departments with whom WorkSafe Victoria can share information.

To conclude, this Bill makes important reforms to dangerous goods legislation, which is over 40 years old, to modernise the regulation of dangerous goods and incorporate it with occupational health and safety laws. These will support industry and businesses to meet their obligations and better enable WorkSafe to enter, intervene and enforce compliance with a suite of modern enforcement tools. Importantly, this Bill will help keep the Victorian community safe from dangerous goods chemical fires and incidents.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:35): I move:

That this debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 15 April.

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:36): I rise to make a contribution on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. This bill before the Parliament is a very important bill in that it talks about balancing the need to ensure we have consumer protection for those that are buying probably the most significant purchase in their lifetime, their home, and also ensuring that we get the building industry moving. There have been a number of occasions in this chamber that I have spoken about one of the key elements that we are really struggling with in Victoria, and that is confidence – confidence to see our economy moving, confidence to get people to invest in Victoria. In line with confidence, one of the reasons why people are not investing is because of costs – everything costs too much. We are the highest taxing state in the nation. We have the highest property taxes in the nation. The cost of building a home – so much of it goes into actually constructing that home. We know people are choosing, unfortunately, ABM or ABV – anywhere but Melbourne or anywhere but Victoria – when it comes to investing. We have got to turn that around, and we desperately need that confidence to get people to invest.

One of the things that the two major parties have both recognised is that we are in a housing crisis in Victoria, and I will certainly concede that the government has been talking about that. We, the opposition, have released the first part of our tranche of policies – more homes, more choice and better affordability. The government have been in government for 12 years, and nothing takes away the fact that even though the government are talking about it and they have a target, which initially was 80,000 homes a year, a few years later, or 12 months later, when that was not being met, it went from 80,000 homes for each and every year to 800,000 over 10 years. People will say that is the same. Well, we know it is not the same, because what the government were hoping to do – they were not meeting the front-end targets, so they have backed it in and by the time they get to year 9 or year 10, 10 years later, when they are not in government, they can say it is not their problem, or they could say they would catch up.

The problem is that since the government has come to power we have the least amount of housing construction build completions in a decade. We are in a housing crisis. We do not have building completions, and the reason why we do not have completions is because of costs. The cost of building is through the roof. We are the most expensive state when it comes to building construction and taxes, and people are choosing other options. We also know about the Big Build, which has been absolutely

caught up in $15 billion worth of CFMEU corruption. That $15 billion, those high costs and the blowouts on the CFMEU Big Build have meant that Labor have put the materials from residential housing into the Big Build. Again, it means that those families that want to build their first home and those Victorians that actually want to get into a rental cannot because there is not the supply.

So what needs to happen? We need to signal to the industry that we are ready to go. This bill does none of that. This bill is actually filled with hypocrisy. The reason why it is filled with hypocrisy is the government is trying to sell this bill as a consumer protection bill, but according to the building industry this bill will drive up building costs, drive small businesses out of business and make it harder for Victorians to build and get into a new home. That should not be the aim of any government. The aim of any government in a housing crisis should be to build more homes, to help builders out and to say, 'What do we need to get you to invest in Victoria?' We know there are a lot of builders when they are looking at this bill saying, 'The regulatory environment makes it too hard to do business in Victoria already. Now you are making it not harder, but impossible to do business in Victoria.' It is absolute hypocrisy.

You might ask why, when a government that talks up a big game that they want to build more homes, 80,000 a year, 800,000, are now 55,000 short in two years. In the first two years they are 55,000 short in that 80,000-a-year target, so they are already not meeting their targets. Then you might say, 'What does this government really want? Is it just a headline? Do they want to also encourage young people to own their own home – the great Australian dream of owning their own home?' Well, you only have to look at what former Premier Daniel Andrews said in March 2022. He said the great Australian dream of owning a home was less of a priority for younger generations compared to previous ones and stated, based on discussions with children and their families, that younger people were more focused on perhaps living where they want to live and that home ownership was not a big thing anymore. Young people do not care anymore. Of course they do not care when they cannot get into one. Of course it is not a priority when housing is unaffordable, when they do not see that opportunity to work hard and build for the future. They do not see that. We have seen many people argue that young people absolutely still desire home ownership but have been priced out of the market. This bill does that. It prices people out of the market according to the building industry, and I will talk about that shortly. The Housing Industry Association (HIA) and Master Builders Victoria (MBV) suggest that building costs could go up by 30 per cent based on these types of regulatory changes, a 30 per cent increase in costs being passed on not to small business but to the person that wants to buy or get into a home. That is why we are not seeing construction being done here in Victoria.

But let me go a little bit further, because you might turn around and say, 'Well, costs are like that everywhere. Young people are not purchasing everywhere.' Well, let me give you a bit of an example because we have Leo, who is interning in our office this week. Leo is 13 years of age. Leo will be voting one day and he has said to me that one day he wants to be able to own his own home. Now, Leo did this research in 5 minutes in my office this morning and what he found was the average first home buyer in Australia is now aged 33 to 36. In 2000, it was 24. In Victoria it is over 40, so it is harder for young people to get into a home in Victoria. Nationally it is 33, it used to be 24 but it is 33. In Victoria it is 40. That is a big gap. What it means in Victoria is that we do not care about getting young people into homes. We do not have the policies to get young people into homes, and people like Leo have to look for other opportunities, because that is not what is happening here in Victoria. That needs to change.

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would encourage you to encourage the member to be accurate. Melbourne has been named as the nation's cheapest city in which to buy a home, and we also lead the nation when it comes to first home owner loan grants.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): It is not for the Chair to determine the facts or otherwise of a contribution. It is presumed that members will do that. I will let the speaker come back to the bill.

David SOUTHWICK: I am right on the bill, but thank you for reminding me. I am right on the bill because we are talking about cost of construction, which is what this bill is about. It is interesting that the minister would make an interjection and a point of order, because the minister is part of the problem. This government is part of the problem when they have a Premier and ministers that have done nothing to ease the cost-of-living pressures on building new homes. We have a bill before us which is two volumes' worth, which we are debating today, and the industry had two weeks to consider this bill – two weeks to consider a bill that will change the industry forever, that will send small businesses out of business and that will send builders out of business. The hypocrisy and the lack of care of this government about the small businesses that they are going to send to the wall – this is a government that does not listen. They do not listen. Instead we have got a bill which they expect the industry to just suck up, to take in and to change effectively what they do, which we know as a result of this will not cause more building; it will cause more builders to go broke. That is why, instead of ministers taking points of order, we want the Premier, the ministers and the Allan Labor government to start to listen to builders and small businesses and to ensure the cost of construction becomes affordable so we can build more homes, give more choice and start to restart Victoria. I therefore move an amendment:

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

If you look at the feedback already, the Housing Industry Association has written to the Premier, to which I do not believe there has been a response, and that letter is also on the Housing Industry Association's LinkedIn page for government if they would like to see what the view of the housing industry is. If the government fails to respond to correspondence directly to the Premier, then maybe they can look at social media to also understand what the industry thinks. The purpose of the letter is to request that the government delay the second-reading debate in the Legislative Assembly:

> The Bill is a substantial piece of legislation. It is described in clause 1 as being a restatement, with amendments, of existing legislation. The Bill is more than just the formality of establishing the Building and Plumbing Commission or an update to compliance and enforcement powers.
>
> A restatement of legislation is not a simple matter. The second reading speech for example indicates that the remade legislation about disciplinary sanctions includes many changes. With the regulator being very active in its compliance and enforcement activity in the past couple of years HIA is very cognisant of the importance of ensuring procedural fairness is not lost.

Now listen to this, if I may:

> The Bill would have taken months for the government to prepare –

two volumes, about 700 pages –

> It is not unreasonable for the industry and other stakeholders to be given at least a few weeks to consider the implications of the Bill and … allow time to contribute to the debate about the merits of this legislation.

That is from the HIA. If I go to the Master Builders Victoria, they talk about some of the issues, particularly with the sequencing of the changes. Those are some of the issues. We do need reform and we are happy with reform. We are happy with a level playing field. We are happy with the Building and Plumbing Commission being tasked with doing some of these things. I do have issues and the industry does have issues with the resourcing of the BPC and certainly with giving the ability for proper process and due process if a builder is found guilty without a process of appeal and what may happen in terms of that business if they were found innocent and what they do in terms of reputational benefit. We must clean up the industry when it comes to shoddy builders, but when you have got 90 per cent of builders that are doing the right thing, you do not need a massive stick. Many of the builders that we should be targeting are the unregistered builders, who are the builders that are not doing the right thing from day one – they are the ones that we should be cleaning up. There is no real effort to really target those that actually do not play by the rules; rather, they are doing everything they can to target the builders that are already doing a lot.

Master Builders Victoria raises significant concerns with the proposed minimum financial requirement (MFR). That is one of the key elements of this bill, which I want to talk about now. That framework is not aligned with the actual drivers of insolvency in the construction sector. They contend that insolvency is primarily caused by cash flow volatility, risk allocation and cumulative regulatory burden rather than insufficient capital and the proposed revenue to net tangible assets model, and that it fails to address these issues. What they are saying is they believe that shifting the model from a work-in-progress cash flow model, which is capacity-based, to a fixed annual revenue cap does not reflect how builders actually manage their risk. What does that mean? What it means is if the builder has contracts of about a million dollars, let us call it, they are two half-million-dollar contracts in round figures. In the previous model they could manage their cash flow and they could continue on with bringing in new jobs as the old job was complete. In this particular model that the Allan Labor government is proposing, if $500,000 worth of one of the jobs is complete, the builder needs to wait until the end of the financial year before they take on another job. How is that building more homes? When they have completed a job, they have actually delivered on the job, so they have got $500,000 left on the liability that was first a million dollars. You would think that they could roll in another job – not according to the minimum financial requirement. There is no sequencing and there is no sense in terms of some of these changes. They are the kinds of things that the industry would want to talk to the government about if they actually picked up the phone and listened. But the government are not listening. They have failed to listen. They are just steaming through.

The multiple major reforms in this bill are creating significant uncertainty and pressure already in a very strained industry. You have got MFR and the National Construction Code converging, which is causing the problem. While there is certainly support for stronger consumer protections and action, which we support and which the industry supports, no question, we have got to have those kinds of consumer protections in place and stamp out poor practices. That is not what we are talking about. Small to medium businesses are particularly exposed with these risks and higher costs, which allow them reduced participation, and many will exit the market. The early intervention and enforcement powers and civil penalties may affect builders due to unclear thresholds and lack of safeguards.

The MBV, Master Builders Victoria, requests a delay to the implementation of the bill and alignment with other reforms and is strongly recommending to allow consultation for refinement and proper sequencing. You have got the HIA and you have got MBV, Master Builders Victoria, both peak bodies, on a unity ticket with our amendment that we are proposing today saying, 'Let's look under the hood; let's actually see what this is going to do to the cost of construction, and let's not put more impost on small businesses and let's not put more homes out of reach for Victorians,' because that is what this government is doing. This government is not protecting Victorians, it is stopping Victorians from getting into a home – from renting one, from buying one, from getting a roof over their heads. If we want 80,000 homes a year, then we have got to ensure that we can have an industry that does that, and this will not happen.

On top of this bill today we have issues in terms of the war, we have issues in terms of fuel costs and we have issues in terms of some of the flow-on effects to materials and to transport. I was told in a forum only a few days ago, again from one of the members of Master Builders, one of the builders, that if they have got a job outside of 30 kilometres they are cancelling the job. They are not travelling beyond 30 kilometres because of the cost of getting onto a site. They are costs that are already being imposed because of fuel costs; they are choices that need to be made. Some of the materials and some of the piping and the resin for those materials are now in short supply, and for those that are in supply, the cost of those materials has been jacked up. So the materials are being jacked up and you have got fuel costs, and the regulatory environment is putting more homes out of reach for all Victorians.

The other part which I want to touch on at the moment talks about dealing with the insurance piece of the bill and what happens in terms of moving the overall insurance piece from 10 years for what are considered to be defects, whether they be major or minor defects, and the obligation on the builder to fix those defects. This is really important when it comes to costs. We know that we had legislation that

was for two years. We now know that we have got legislative changes for fixing defects proposed in this bill for 10 years. The issue is that many of the materials and many of the products that builders use have a warranty, and many of those warranties would be, say, up to seven years. What happens when the warranties that this government is proposing are beyond that seven years and are in fact 10? If you have got warranties for white goods that are seven years but the builder has to give a 10-year warranty on the build, how does the builder make up the difference? I will tell you how he makes up the difference: he charges the consumer. That is the only way you can make up the difference. So costs go up.

How does that happen? Builders are telling me that they have to factor maintenance people into the cost of the contract to go around and inspect the properties in the lead-up to the 10 years to minimise the cost when it hits 10 years. Some people might like that. Some people might say, 'Great, I wouldn't mind a maintenance contract built into my building cost, and I'm happy to pay 30 per cent more for that. If the cost is 400 grand, I'm happy to pay $520,000 for that.' But most people will not want to do that. They will want the best cost for the building construction. Sure, they do not want a dodgy build. But some of the issues with this bill are actually in determining what a major issue is, in terms of a structural issue, which is a fair go if you have got a structural issue, versus what is a minor defect and what happens in terms of the builder obligations versus somebody else. If a builder has gone in and built something and then a landscaper comes in and does something else, and the landscape piece changes issues in terms of the overall build site, then who is responsible? Is it the landscaper that might have been contracted a year or two later, or is it the builder? There are issues to work out.

Then also, what is considered a major or minor defect? If there is paint that has faded in the ninth year and the paint warranty is for seven years, who makes up the difference? Does the builder need to come back onsite and repaint the house? They are questions that the government has not worked out. When we asked in the briefing what is major and what is minor, we were told these issues will be worked out later. You cannot work it out later if builders are signing fixed contracts today. If builders are signing fixed contracts today, they are locked in for 10 years, and they need to know the difference between if they have got to come back and fix up a paint job and if they have got to come back and fix up a structural defect. They need to know what the difference is. If you are going to have the builder on the hook for all of this, then ultimately the consumer will pay. In a cost-of-living crisis, in a cost-of-construction crisis and when 43 per cent of the cost of building a home in Victoria is taxes and regulations, then what do we expect? We expect it to go up, and we expect building and houses to be more out of reach for Victorians. That has got to change.

If I could just draw attention to the BPC, I did make mention of this during the cladding bill earlier. The Building and Plumbing Commission will be the regulator, they will be the enforcer and they will be the one group that will do everything on a build when it comes to building and construction. So if you have got a problem, if you are unhappy with a build, you will ring up the BPC and say, 'Can you please fix this for me, because I believe I've got a dodgy builder?' There will be legitimate things that the BPC will need to investigate. This is all meant to come into play on 1 July. Are the BPC properly resourced? What additional things will the BPC need to do? How will the BPC fulfil these obligations?

I just draw the attention of this house to a Google review, because we love Google reviews. Many small businesses rely on their Google reviews because that is their reputation and how people buy their goods or services. I know for many people who might be thinking about a new builder, the first thing they would do is a Google review. How is that builder? Have they built other homes? What have they built? What is their reputation like? Well, google the reviews on the BPC and see what their reputation is like pre these changes with all the work they have got to do. I did a google, and they got a 1½-star rating. You should read it. It says:

> Disgusting commission which has already forgotten the purpose for which it was formed. Leaving hard working Aussies stuck in the mud, when they don't ignore you they'll leave you waiting numerous months if not years for a outcome …

That is from Nick B on a Google review. He gave them a 1-star. Another 1-star from Joel says:

> Too many confusing layers staff not very helpful doing the run around … VBA have just rebranded to BPC same stuff around. Very disappointing.

That is a Google review. I would suggest the government have a look at these Google reviews of this new body that is going to fix the problems. I could go on forever. This government might turn around and say, 'Oh, you're just making this stuff up.' Well, here is a full name, Wade Harris on a Google review. Wade Harris gave 1 star five months ago, saying:

> Somehow the BPC is actually more useless and incompetent than the VBA. Made an inquiry through the 'online form' regarding Plumbers insurance policy for defective works (burst plumbing pipes) and received an automated 'no reply' response …

There you go. Leo, my intern, would do a far better job. He would pick up the phone; he would fix it. This lot: do we have the confidence that they are going to fix it by 1 July? I would urge this government, if they were serious about listening, if they were serious about fixing the housing crisis and if they were serious about getting more homes, delivering the 80,000 homes that they promised, to delay this bill, talk to builders, talk to the industry and get it right. Unravelling it will not fix the builders that are leaving the industry in droves, leaving Victoria because they say 'anywhere but Victoria' because it is too hard to do business. That will not fix it. The damage will already be done. This government has had years to fix the problem. They have come in, and they have given no time at all to read volumes of a bill that no-one in their right mind could get through. You would need dozens of lawyers to get through this, and they expect the industry to get through it in two weeks. What a joke. This is consultation: leaving builders out in the cold in a cost-of-living crisis and in a fuel crisis, expecting builders to pick up the tab. No wonder we do not have homes built in Victoria. No wonder it is too hard to do business in Victoria.

I urge the government to support our reasoned amendment. Push it down the road. Let us get the fuel crisis under control, let us talk to builders, let us ensure we clean up the mess of dodgy builders and let us give builders that are doing the right thing the opportunity to build more homes, because that makes sense. Do not penalise the hardworking builders, the salt of the earth, that are doing the right thing. Do not do that. Do not turn them away. Do not make it harder; work with them. It seems like this government is always about envy. You have got somebody, a tradie, that is trying to have a go, trying to build a bit of something for their family, but this government says, 'No, we're not going to support you; we're going to ignore you.' All the signals are wrong.

If you want more homes, you have got to be able to ensure you have a regulatory environment that makes sense. Do not keep changing the rules. Do not take a sledgehammer to a problem that you can fix by sitting down with the industry and getting it right in the first place. That is what we are seeing with this bill today. We have got to work with the industry. The industry know what they are doing. You have got very sensible people. The Housing Industry Association and Master Builders Victoria want to work with the government. They are not political. They just want to sit down and work with the government. They have requested that the Premier delay this bill, and I would plead with the government to delay this bill. Let us work together and ensure we get the costs right and get more homes. The coalition is determined to build more homes, to reduce red tape, to ease the regulatory burden and to ensure we have a better taxation system that encourages investment, returns confidence and reduces costs. That is what we will do because it makes sense. What this government is doing is chalk and cheese. You only have to look at the volumes of the bill that we are seeing before us, which has had no consultation and about which they have had no interest in listening to the industry. Why? Because the Allan Labor government again thinks they know best.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:06): I might just address some of the matters raised. Victoria is building more homes than any other state in the country. You would not think that from what we just heard from the opposition, and I must say their plan for housing for the future of Victoria sadly leaves millennials and below well out of the picture. They want to shovel people into a few inner-city areas,

just pad them up, and then the rest can go as far out as you can imagine, which means that they would be spending an eternity in traffic trying to get to their relative jobs, including builders themselves. So I do not think they are ones to be claiming glory when it comes to thinking of homes for younger people – and I note that we have more first home buyers than any other state. So if we are talking about breaking into the market, that is certainly a top priority for our government.

We have slashed stamp duty on off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses for 24 months to cut up-front costs, speed up building and make it more affordable for everyone to buy off the plan. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund shared equity scheme contributes 25 per cent of the purchase price. Now, this is to do with renters, but just so you know, there is a cap of one residential rent rise per 12 months. When people are saving to buy a home, it is important that we are looking at all the costs. We are also providing first home buyer stamp duty exemptions on properties up to $600,000 and concessions on properties from $600,001 to $750,000. We also offer first home owner grants of $10,000. This support topped $900 million last financial year. We have also changed the rules on building and pest inspections so that the vendor, not the buyer, provides them, saving families up to $4200 and countless hours often wasted if they are outbid and do not buy the property. That is just to note some – just some – of the many, many cost-of-living measures that we are introducing.

But coming back to the core elements of the bill – and we know that a handful of dodgy builders undermine the whole industry – I do not think we can afford another delay. Getting these important reforms through the house is paramount for the benefit of consumers – for the benefit of Victorians – but also for the reputations of all the good guys in the industry, all the good builders that are doing the right thing. I personally witnessed with my mother after my father died, when she had various renovations, a good builder that did fantastic renovations and turned up when they were meant to, and we did not have any problems after the build. That was a renovation many, many moons ago. But subsequently another builder came along who would turn up at 4 or 5 in the afternoon and run lights at night and was buying endless supplies and actually not delivering a product. In the end she had to end that contract and get another builder to complete the contract. The point of that is not just giving two examples, because there are many, many more examples, unfortunately, of decent Victorians who have had very bad experiences. The imperative is to bring about what is the most comprehensive overhaul since the building legislation was first introduced over 30 years ago, noting the substantial changes in the industries themselves over that period of time.

The scale of change since 1993 is immense and not to be underestimated in any way, and it is very confusing because I do not know what the signal is. The Liberals previously opposed our buyer protection reforms but then on the other hand were calling them 'dodgy builders'. So it is a very confusing message, and I am not sure what they expect Victorian consumers to glean from those very confusing messages, particularly as they want to jam up this bill based on the amendment that was just circulated.

I think it should not be underestimated, shovelling young people way, way, way, way, way out of the city, noting that we cannot forever be penetrating good agricultural land and moreover the bush. We actually do need some sort of ecology; hence building up the middle-ring suburbs, noting I live in Southbank, which is a very dense area, and there is more and more high-density housing coming on board there. If you want to call out where I am coming from, I live in high-density housing, so I am not opposed to that. And I live it; I live in a 37-storey building. This is Labor's plan: building up those middle-ring suburbs that really have not taken the brunt of the building load. We know areas such as Melton, as an example, have taken more than their fair share, if we are going to talk of the relative load of housing in this state. It is ultimately about fellow Victorians. If we are going to think from a point of equity and fairness for now and future generations, I really am not copping it from the opposition when they are saying they are the ones thinking of young people. I think not.

These are new powers, and they are needed. It is really about – and fundamentally this is what underpins this legislation – putting health and safety at the centre. We are all better off. It is not good for builders themselves as well to be tied up in years and years and years of litigation. The vicissitude

of acts has led to the outcome actually being proactive, on the front foot and incentivising, for want of a better word, or driving, I should say, better outcomes in terms of the quality of builds. Surely that has to be in the interests of all Victorians.

What are the main reforms in this bill? It is delivering a new principal act for building and plumbing, and it will sit at the core of a contemporary integrated legislative system. It will be a modern legislative framework that is easier to navigate. Surely that is better for everyone in the industry. I know the member for Caulfield was exclaiming at the sheer size of the legislation. I would not say that that is a reason to baulk at and run from the legislation – because it has two volumes et cetera. Surely detail is paramount in circumstances such as building and construction, noting that it is easier to navigate, which surely is better for everyone in the industry but also the adaptation capacity as the industry continues to evolve. And it will, and it should.

The bill includes an overarching building system objective, as I stated from the outset. This is the fundamental tenet putting health and safety first in all building legislation related decisions. This objective will drive and align decision-making towards a common goal, supported by complementary objectives for building regulators. The commission will be established with a best practice, long-term governance model with sustainable funding arrangements, and each role across the building system will be clearly articulated and defined rather than duplicative or conflicting. So it is thinking about all those, not least the builders who have to operate in a high-pressure environment, no question whatsoever. I would classify it as a difficult profession. I am not a builder myself, but it certainly requires a lot of precision and there is certainly a lot of risk in that role. But reducing the complexity and the layering, so to speak, has got to be a good thing. And it establishes a new enforcement framework for Victoria's building legislation with modern best practice powers that equip the Building and Plumbing Commission with regulatory teeth, because we know the sheer pain and suffering for those who have endured very bad outcomes as the result of, can I say, faulty building practices, which undermine all builders, and it is not fair to them either. We are actually thinking about the majority of builders, who do the right thing and work really hard and who are undermined by those who seek to cut corners, and really about having an effective watchdog at the end of the day, which can then, coming back to that question of confidence, restore the confidence of consumers.

So how is this being done? It will be through new tools to enforce higher civil penalties, as well as a broader scope to issue infringement notices and the ability to hold directors personally liable for wrongdoing. This includes changes making it harder for company directors to escape consequences by phoenixing their business. I do not think it will be out of context here to say that there have been so many incidents of phoenixing it is not funny, and it would break your heart when somebody who has truly had very bad building practices simply shuts down and resurfaces with a magical new structure that belies the sins of the past. Surmounting these kinds of, I could say, heartbreaking ramifications of those activities is surely a priority when we are looking at the health and safety of Victorians.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (12:16): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution. I will just seek your indulgence for less than 30 seconds, Acting Speaker, as I will not get an opportunity to do so in this place this week, to shout out to my community of Porepunkah, who you all know are in the Ovens Valley community. I want to commend their resilience over the last seven months. They did not ask to have two police officers shot and killed in their backyard. They have done an outstanding job to continue on, and I just want to do a big shout-out for them. This chapter is now closed. I have the utmost support and respect for Victoria Police, and I just wanted to do that shout-out. Thank you, Acting Speaker.

Moving on to the bill, I do want to talk about the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, and I will follow on from the member for Caulfield, who has moved a reasoned amendment. I do support that amendment, which is:

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

I do not want to go over everything that the member for Caulfield has said, but he did point out some very interesting facts. We do walk a very fine line when we try to balance first home buyers needs with keeping builders accountable and making sure that we have good solid buildings, but at the same time we know that it is cost that is causing a lot of pain as we move forward. We have to do everything we can to try and reduce that cost while not reducing the standards and to make sure that we keep builders accountable. We know that that cost is getting very high, and we do know much of the cost of building a house is tax – 43 per cent, to my understanding, of that is tax. That is not conducive to a strong building industry either. With those high costs of building materials and high taxes, combined with rental providers who are selling up their properties, we are in a housing crisis. We are well aware of that, and we need to make sure that we do what we can to improve this situation. As the member for Caulfield mentioned, the average homebuyer in Australia is between the ages of 33 and 36, and in Victoria they are over 40. So that is just an example of the costs. For those in Victoria, they have got to wait a little bit longer, and that is quite disappointing. But we will move on.

As was mentioned by the lead speaker, the Master Builders Victoria and the Housing Industry Association (HIA) both agree with our reasoned amendment, and that is to pause and have more conversations with the industry to make sure they get this right. The Master Builders have suggested anywhere between a 10 and 30 per cent increase could come about because of these construction costs. Breaking that down, there could be a 10 per cent increase through insurance for future rectification orders and somewhere between that 10 and 30 per cent due to the NCC, the National Construction Code, being implemented. That increases insurance premiums and, partly due to the increased premiums, first-resort insurance, and there is some allowance for an increase in cost to comply with the new minimum financial requirement. There are some real issues in there that should be addressed in this bill rather than waiting for a year or two after we get going with this bill.

We do see quite often that legislation is introduced and debated in this house and then two years later we come back to tidy up some of the mistakes. We just implore the government to consider these, even between houses, to make sure that we do get this right, because all of us in Victoria need to ensure we have got a better building industry, because the housing crisis is no different in the Ovens Valley, Cobram, Yarrawonga or Myrtleford than in metropolitan Melbourne. I have people come to my office all the time saying that they need housing and they are living at the river. Beyond Housing are now telling me it will be five to 10 years before those people get a home, and that is tragic for those people. So it is in all of our best interests to make sure that the housing industry improves, and this bill is an improvement for all of us, because the 800,000 houses that were promised over 10 years – well, clearly it is not happening. 54,000 was the number I got for the last 12 months. Added to that are the rental providers, who are jumping ship at every turn, and I cannot say that I blame them, because the land tax is in turn making them want to jump ship and either get out of being a rental provider or take their investment and go to another state, and that is not what we want.

In terms of renters, we know that at every rental opportunity there are 50 to 100 people lined up to try and secure that property, whether it is a house, an apartment or whatever. Those queues are getting quite long, and again it is in all of our best interests to make sure that the housing industry thrives as we go forward. The Victorian government continues to talk about improving the housing industry, wanting to win votes, and saying, 'Look, this is how we are looking after renters,' but the reality is, if we either make this more difficult for rental providers or make the costs more expensive for builders, we are just not going to help renters at all, because we cannot be so blind as not see that it is not going to get passed on to the renter. Any cost, whether it is a land tax or whether it is an increase in the cost of building a house, the rental always has a formula – 4 or 5 per cent of what the cost of the building is or thereabouts – and that is always going to be the case. As costs go up, buildings go up, landlords or rental providers are going to pass that cost on, and we know that is just not going to help.

Where else should we get to? The Allan Labor government needs to start to listen. They sincerely need to listen to, as we said before, the Master Builders association and the HIA. Stop thinking they know it all. Stop wanting to drive Victorians north out of Victoria to New South Wales and Queensland. I

did hear a statistic the other day that up to 35 per cent of Victorians are thinking about leaving Victoria. That is not what we want; that is not good for anybody. We have to give them the encouragement to feel that they should stay and we want them to stay. Giving them a house to live in, or the opportunity to live in a house, is a damn good start.

Victorians are getting sick of picking up the tab all the time – if it is an extra cost in the building sector, if rental goes up. We have talked about some of the legislation that has come through this place that supports renters, and I support renters 100 per cent, but if it comes at the expense of landlords or rental providers, then we have to be very careful of that balance, because we know where the cost is going to end up. It is no good saying the rental provider is going to wear that cost, because we know that is not going to be the case. As I said, listen to the industry – HIA, Master Builders association – because with the amount of tax that we currently pay on building a house, if this legislation brings in more cost to the building industry, then we are going to see it get even more difficult to get a house and the housing crisis that we are currently in will only get worse.

We know how things change quickly. We have seen with the fuel crisis that it is happening in all of our communities at the moment, not just in regional Victoria but all across metropolitan Melbourne. Everybody is feeling this pain, and we just see how things change very quickly. Sometimes I think the government forgets that legislation like this can make changes to an industry like the housing industry. If it adds more cost, it does not take long for things turn upside down very quickly. That is why I just implore the government to make sure that they listen to the industry, maybe between houses, so we can get it right.

In my patch, Yarrawonga is the fastest growing town in regional Victoria. There is building going on left, right and centre. There are people moving there to retire, people moving there to grow their families. It is a wonderful part of the world, and it is only a bit under 3 hours to Melbourne, so people can still get home to babysit their grandkids if they want to and get down to Melbourne. It is communities like Yarrawonga who are growing very quickly. We want to make sure that continues because it takes the pressure off Melbourne.

Those who want a house in Melbourne, if they cannot get one, well, they can look to the country. But at the moment we cannot provide those, because the costs are very high, and if this bill continues to escalate those prices in housing, then again we are going to see for quite some years down the track that we will be saying to people, 'Don't look further afield into regional Victoria, because we can't handle what we've got. We'd love to build more houses for you. We'd love to be able to support the overflow from Melbourne, but at the moment we can't.' With those words, I suggest that the government look at the reasoned amendment that the member for Caulfield has put, and I do sincerely hope that they will listen to the industry and support this reasoned amendment.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (12:26): I do not think there would be a single member in this place who has not had a constituent come to their office with a devastating story about making the largest purchase they will make in their lifetime and dealing with a shoddy building. We know that most builders take great pride in their work. They deliver great homes and apartments. But this bill is for enforcement for the small minority who do the wrong thing and in turn support for the builders who do the right thing. I listened to the member for Albert Park before, and she mentioned the devastation that comes from when a builder phoenixes. I have a shocking example from my electorate where a rather notorious developer under the name of Shangri-La Construction built a property that did not have adequate waterproofing throughout the apartments, and of course the apartments ended up flooding. When they sought recompense they discovered – not long after this builder was featured on *60 Minutes* for a comparable building in, I believe it was, Carnegie – that the builder had phoenixed. So the builder was still building, still had a business, and the consumer protections needed to be in place to support those potential purchases.

I am really pleased to make a contribution to the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 because housing is a key priority of this government. As Parliamentary

Secretary for Homes I have been able to be engaged throughout the process – the development of this bill – and the broader reforms we are making to the Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC) to make sure that consumers are front and centre of our reforms, because it is so important that, yes, we build more homes, but we are building quality homes, and that there is confidence in the market. And if homebuyers are confident in the lasting quality of a new home, particularly for my community in off-the-plan apartments, they are more likely to buy.

Building and buying a home is of course the biggest investment most of us will ever make, and Victorians rightfully expect to get what they pay for. Stronger consumer protections are something that I would have thought everyone in this place would support. I am not surprised, though. It is disappointing to see that those opposite are responding to the concerns only of big industry and not supporting reforms that will protect people who are making this investment in a home, because stronger regulation to prevent and rectify shoddy building work will save Victorians from serious financial challenges and it will protect them from the debilitating debts that they would incur if they were left to fend for themselves.

As I said, many in this place will have been confronted with the consequences of dodgy building. In my electorate there have been too many residents who have been ripped off by builders, surveyors and other parts of our building system. Victorians deserve a building regulatory system that gives them the confidence they need to build, to buy and to rent in Victoria. Tradies and other workers in the building industry know the pride they feel at showing off a house that they helped build to their friends and family. We know that good builders and home designers like nothing better than to see purchasers moving into a high-quality home, and we want this experience to be the case for everyone who interacts with the Victorian building industry. This is about the very small cohort of builders who have been doing the wrong thing. Over time that has eroded community trust in the building industry, and it risks putting reputable builders out of work.

This bill finalises the establishment of Labor's new integrated building watchdog, the BPC, and it gives it even more enforcement powers to prevent dodgy work. Whilst not having the political bravery to clean up the building industry themselves, the opposition have repeatedly called for reforms to protect consumers. Once upon a time those opposite introduced a similar bill, but then they pulled it at the behest of their corporate masters when they were last in power. In the over 30 years since the Building Act 1993 was first passed the industry has not been able to self-police these rogue operators, and it is time that we introduce a new principal building act and finalise the establishment of the new and improved regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission, so it can get on with its important work.

This bill introduces for the first time a clear building system objective which legally places consumers at the heart of the system. The objective of the building system of course is to promote and protect the health and safety of building occupants and the public. In Victoria's building system people must come first. This is the type of reform that only Labor governments would make. On this side of the house we believe that working Victorians should be at the centre of all of our work. We believe that reforms like this are how we support working people through the biggest purchases of their lives. This new building system objective underpins all regulation and activity across Victoria's building system, protecting consumers who need it most. At its core this objective makes clear that protecting the health and safety of building occupants and the public is paramount whenever building and plumbing work is carried out or regulated. Putting people first is non-negotiable, and this building objective creates a clear lens through which all decisions that affect the building system are to be made. This building objective reform is not a minor change of language but a complete reorientation of the building system. This bill will protect consumers from being exposed to devastating debt and rectification costs and rebuild confidence and trust in Victoria's building system.

Of course, while the vast majority of builders and plumbers work with pride, professionalism and high standards of quality and integrity, we also know that the bad actors need to face consequences to stop them undermining the hardworking builders in the industry. When things do go wrong, the financial

and emotional impacts on consumers are devastating, and when the reputation of the industry is tarnished, all hardworking professional builders and plumbers are impacted as consumer confidence and investment in the industry diminish. We are introducing an enforcement framework that contains a range of measures to enhance the ability of the commission and other building system regulators such as municipal building surveyors, Energy Safe Victoria and fire safety authorities to monitor and investigate compliance with building legislation.

In concluding my comments on this bill I would like to acknowledge the residents of Roberts Street in West Footscray and the residents of Barkly Street in West Footscray who have come to my office to talk to me about the crippling experience of moving into a property that has not been properly built and not being able to seek recompense from the builder. The financial pressure that this puts on ordinary working people who were just trying to do the right thing and find a place for their family to live has been absolutely devastating. When I have spoken to them about the government's commitment, it is about our commitment to them as consumers. I commend this bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:36): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. Straight off, we have moved a reasoned amendment on this bill, and for good reason. If I can just read it out again, it is that:

> … this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has allowed for proper consultation with the industry to occur.

That is what the industry is telling us – that the government had months and months and maybe years to create this 700-odd-page bill and the industry has had two weeks to look at it. The member for Albert Park actually said this is one of the most comprehensive overhauls in building. Why give the Housing Industry Association (HIA) and the MBV, Master Builders Victoria, two weeks to look at what the member for Albert Park described as 'the most comprehensive overhaul' of building? They got two weeks to reach out to their members to get feedback. That is why we have moved this reasoned amendment, because if it is what the member for Albert Park stated, then they need more time. That is what they are saying to the opposition, and that is what they have clearly stated to the member for Caulfield, the shadow minister in this space.

I tell you what, I hope the government going forward gets some speakers up here with a little bit more credibility than the last two I have just listened to, their two leading speakers on this bill, because what came out of their mouths was absolute rubbish. They actually have not read the bill and they do not understand the bill, and that is why they are just rambling on the way they are. It is really that simple. If people actually got into the guts of this bill and talked to the builders in the industry about why this bill is not good for the industry, they would get the feedback. That is the problem with that side of the chamber: they just take the minister's notes. They are too lazy to actually pick up the phone and talk to builders about this bill. My phone has rung off the hook about this and particularly about the minimum financial requirement. This is going to just hamper building houses in this state like you would not believe. I am going to start with a bit of an education for those opposite, who might actually pick this up. The first thing I will say to them, because I think they are clueless when it comes to construction, is that this part of the hammer hammers in the nails and this part of the hammer pulls the nails out. There is your first lesson.

Now let us get into the MFR. The minimum financial requirement will completely decimate mum-and-dad builders in this state. I will put it in the simplest terms I possibly can so those opposite can understand. If I am a builder and I have a turnover limit of $2 million or a million dollars – it does not matter – the old system would be that once I finished a house, which might be worth $350,000, that would come off and I could roll another house back on. The minimum financial requirement stops all that. The minimum financial requirement is on your overall turnover. If I build a house for you, for example, at $500,000 and then you decide you want all the bells and whistles in your kitchen and in your bathrooms and everything else and raise a variation with me as the builder for another $200,000 of work, that goes to your overall cap. Variations should be excluded. It is overall revenue. If you are

a builder like me – before I got into this place I did commercial construction and domestic construction – they all now get lumped in together. If I am on a $2 million limit and I do a $1 million commercial project, I only get $1 million of housing. That is about 2½ houses a year on an average cost. That is it; I cannot build any more homes. How do you think it is going to hamper the Metricons and the Simonds of the world, who are our biggest deliverers of homes in this state, that they are now capped at a turnover? They cannot roll one house off and bring another house on.

If you are trying to reach a target of 80,000 homes a year, you have just put it in the toilet by introducing this bill. You have absolutely stuffed it. You are already 44,000 or 46,000 homes behind in two years alone. That is on the government's own target. This bill is going to drive those targets right down into the sewer. The way this is going to affect the building industry is absolutely ridiculous. I do not think the government has any idea of what this will do to the mum-and-dad builders in the state, and they are the ones that actually deliver most of the homes. It is not your Metricons, it is not your Simonds, it is your mum-and-dads; they are the ones.

The member for Footscray – honestly, I wish the member had not walked out – actually said we are only worried about big industry. The HIA and Master Builders Victoria membership is not big industry. They are small business owners. They are mum-and-dad builders. They are the ones that are employing tradies. What an absolutely clueless comment to make, that that is where this is targeted at and that is why we have brought in this reasoned amendment. We have brought in the reasoned amendment because the two biggest building sector agencies in Victoria, being the Housing Industry Association and Master Builders Victoria, which represent the mum-and-dad builders in this state, said they need more time. But again the government is too arrogant to listen to them. The government is too stupid to take their advice. I have said this before in this chamber. The government keep ignoring the advice of the building industry, and they are warning them time and time again: 'If you keep going down this line, you will not get homes built.' They said it on the last bill and they are saying it on this bill, but the government is too arrogant to give them more time to look at the bill to give them the feedback to make it better. Two weeks to look at that many pages is ridiculous after the government had months or years to develop the bill. It is absolutely ridiculous, and it is a massive slap to the industry again. It is a massive slap that the government is just too arrogant to even consider their request for an extension to look at the bill in proper detail.

It is obvious those on that side have not looked at the bill in proper detail, or the first two speakers have not, because what they said in the first two contributions was absolute rubbish. The member for Footscray got up and talked about a dodgy builder – and, yes, there are dodgy builders in the industry – and about the waterproofing not being correct. Since I have been in this place I have been begging the government to bring in waterproof inspections. It still has not happened. I have always said, 'Stop the problem at the front end, not the back end.' If you are going to raise a certificate for something, it should be inspected. That is a no-brainer. It is called common sense, which it did not take me long to find out is severely lacking in this place. Common sense would be to have waterproofing inspections. The biggest defects in the industry are water leaks, so why don't we inspect it? Why? It is a simple question. The builders are up for it. I actually know builders in the member for Berwick's area, I believe, SJD Homes, that are already doing their own waterproofing inspections because they recognise that is the biggest liability on a house.

Then, not to whack the building industry enough, we have taken minor defects from two years to 10 years, which is absolutely stupid. When you have got paint that is only guaranteed for seven years and someone can say after nine years, 'My paint has faded; you fix it,' that is a stupid, stupid thing to do. All this government is doing is wrecking the construction industry in this state. All this government will be doing with this legislation, by ignoring the industry and their request to look at it further and more in depth, will be delivering less homes in Victoria in the middle of a housing crisis. You cannot meet your own targets you set anyway, so why wouldn't you listen to the industry to get more homes into the market? This bill and what the government has done to the construction industry in Victoria are just criminal. It is criminal. New builders trying to get into the industry will not be able to do it

under the minimum financial requirement. They are the new ones we need coming through. We need more trades. We need everything, and all this government has done to the industry since I have been here is stuff them around.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:46): I am proud to be rising in support of this bill because Victoria is facing a housing crisis, and when we talk about a housing crisis we have got to be honest about the solution. We need to build more homes, because without more homes prices rise, rents rise and people are locked out of the communities that they love. I see this in my own electorate in Northcote. Young people who grew up locally want to stay close to their families; essential workers, healthcare workers and professionals want to live near their jobs; and renters want the security of quality affordable homes as well as the chance to take that next step into home ownership when the time is right for them. But for too many that dream feels so far away. Solving the housing crisis means increasing supply, but it also means building the right homes: homes that are safe, secure and built to last; homes that people can confidently invest in; homes that draw on our knowledge of sustainability and good design; and homes that strengthen communities for the long term.

In my electorate of Northcote we are already seeing what it looks like to get that right through the Victorian Labor government's investment in social and community housing. Projects like the Walker Street development and the Oakover Road homes in my electorate are delivering high-quality, energy-efficient, well-designed accessible housing for people who need it most. These are homes that have been thoughtfully planned to integrate into the local landscape and the streetscape to support a diverse mix of households and to provide long-term livability. They are giving older women at risk of homelessness, young people, families and individuals access to secure, dignified housing in the communities that they are a part of, close to services and to transport – homes where they are needed. Critically they are being delivered to a high standard. They set a benchmark for what good development should look like, because when people can see that new housing is well built and well managed and enhances the neighbourhood, it builds confidence. It shows that increasing supply and maintaining our communities and everything we love about them can go hand in hand, because building homes is not just about numbers, it is about trust.

I have spent years advocating on behalf of residents, traders and community members in Northcote who have borne the brunt of consequences when builders and developers fail to meet those standards. I have raised in this place and directly with authorities the concerns of residents in developments where approved plans have not been followed, where promised landscaping outcomes have not been delivered or where defects and safety issues have been left unresolved for far too long. The impact of these outcomes is that too many Victorians feel that buying off the plan, building their own home or even renovating is a risk. We want first home buyers to feel like they can take that step. We want people to be able to build their dream home, to invest their hard-earned savings into their future and to know that they are not taking a gamble. But the lack of confidence is holding people back, and when people hold back, projects stall and fewer homes get built.

If we are serious about addressing the housing crisis, we must restore confidence in the checks and balances that hold the building industry to high standards. That is what this bill does. The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 establishes that modern, coherent framework for the building and plumbing system in Victoria. Right now responsibilities are spread across multiple pieces of legislation, creating confusion and gaps in accountability. This bill brings those functions together and creates a clear and consistent framework for the entire life cycle of building and plumbing work. At the centre of all of that is the Building and Plumbing Commission, a single integrated regulator overseeing compliance and enforcement, licensing, dispute resolution and key consumer protection mechanisms. In practical terms it means stronger oversight and better protections for Victorians building, renovating or buying a home. It introduces for the first time a clear building system objective which legally places consumers at the heart of the system, because in Victoria people come first.

Through my electorate office we have worked closely with many constituents dealing with the very real consequences of a system that has not always protected them. We have supported residents facing

serious building defects, including water ingress, structural issues, mould and incomplete works that have rendered homes unsafe or unlivable, and we have supported residents who have exhausted their savings trying to rectify defects left behind by builders who have since been liquidated. We have worked with owners corporations dealing with widespread defects across entire developments where the burden of rectification has fallen unfairly on residents. We have worked through the complexities of buildings impacted by combustible cladding, supporting people through the state's rectification program, and we have helped individuals trying to understand their rights in a system that can be complex and difficult to navigate. These are not isolated cases, they are recurring patterns, and behind every case is a person or a family or indeed a whole apartment of people dealing with stress, uncertainty and financial pressure.

This bill finalises the establishment of our new integrated building watchdog, the Building and Plumbing Commission, and gives it even more enforcement powers to prevent dodgy work, hold the industry to account and make the regulator's activities more transparent. It is part of our ongoing work as a Labor government to improve consumer protections – protections that those opposite too often treat as an afterthought. That afterthought is people's lives. Building or buying a home is likely the biggest investment a family will ever make. It cannot be just a leap of faith; it needs to come with certainty.

This bill is integral to creating a system that supports building high-quality homes not just for today but for the future. We know that the vast majority of builders and plumbers work with pride, professionalism and high standards of quality and integrity. It is tough work, detailed work and work that makes possible the magnificent physical environment that we all enjoy every single day in our city and in our suburbs. That is no small feat, and our builders and plumbers should be proud. You hear that pride when they drive past a building and say, 'I built that.' These reforms are for them too so they can work in a system with integrity. But we also know that there are bad actors – people in businesses who will cut and run to make a profit no matter the harm they leave in their wake. These operators need to face serious consequences that stop them from undermining the hardworking Victorians in the building industry and selling out consumers.

Those opposite have argued today that this bill will slow down the housing market, effectively admitting that they are willing to roll the dice on quality in order to push through development. We know what that means. We have seen this play before. It means people left with poor-quality builds, defects and devastating debt. We need a robust compliance and enforcement framework that can drive out those who wilfully flout the law and guide, educate and assist those who are doing the right thing. The bill strengthens enforcement, giving the commission the tools it needs to act clearly, act decisively and act proportionately. At the front end we are introducing stronger early intervention powers like improvement notices and a modernised infringement scheme so issues can be addressed before they escalate to serious harm.

At the serious end of the spectrum, we are introducing a new civil penalty regime. This will allow courts to impose much bigger financial penalties for major breaches, up to $600,000 for individuals, and to strip companies of profits made by cutting corners, because right now, for some operators, penalties can simply be absorbed in the cost of doing business. This bill puts an end to that. It removes the financial incentive to do the wrong thing. We are also introducing stronger investigation powers, including the ability to compel answers and new offences to protect authorised officers from obstruction or abuse while doing their jobs. One of the most significant reforms in this bill is director accountability. For too long we have seen dodgy operators hide behind corporate structures, walking away from defective work and liquidating and then starting up under a new company name. That practice, phoenixing, leaves consumers to pick up the pieces, and this bill tackles it head on. In practical terms it makes it much harder to walk away from accountability and much harder to start again with a clean slate after doing the wrong thing.

Taken together, these reforms are about restoring trust. They are about creating a system that supports families, first home buyers and consumers with the confidence to build and buy their homes without

feeling like it is just a gamble. When first home buyers feel confident, when families feel protected, when communities trust the system, more homes get built.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (12:56): I rise to speak on the Building and Plumbing. Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, and in doing so it is through the lens of being the shadow minister responsible for home ownership and housing affordability. This is the lens through which Victorians will judge everything that the government does on building. Is this delivering more homes? Is this delivering more supply? Is this getting them into a home? Is this getting me into a rental sooner? There exists, as we know, a housing crisis in our nation. Is Victoria playing its part in addressing the issues so that it helps Victorians get into homes? The right question on this bill is not whether it has good intentions, it is will it build more homes? Will it make those homes cheaper? Will it put home ownership back within the reach of young Victorians? On every one of those tests this government fails.

I support the position of the Shadow Minister for Housing and Building that we will move a reasoned amendment which has actually come from the industry asking for us to not continue with this bill until further consultation has taken place. This is not the first bill that we have debated in the house where we have spoken on the side of industry or on the side of the sector, who have actually asked for bills to be paused so that meaningful and genuine consultation can actually take place. Firstly, let me say that in terms of genuine consultation when you speak to the Housing Industry Association they have formally requested a delay. Master Builders Victoria has called for a deferral and a redesign. These are not anti-reform voices; these are people from within the industry building the homes and the builders that they represent. The builders themselves are the people who were not meaningfully consulted before this bill was introduced, and that speaks to a pattern of behaviour from this government.

It is so true to form, so true to character, that here we are again without consultation having taken place, without actually asking the experts. Do not worry about the health advice, member for Berwick. Do not worry about having to ask actual people within the disability sector. Do not worry about actually asking people within the child protection sector. Here we are again with another bill where there has not been true consultation, where the industry has spoken out against the government and said, 'Hold on a minute. Have you even asked us, have you even consulted with us?' There is this dictatorial, top-down, big government approach that comes from the Allan Labor government where, when you look at planning more broadly, there is no right to object, there is no way to take it to VCAT, there is no right to appeal and there is a stifling and silencing of the voices of the community. They do not actually get to have a say about their own neighbourhood. Here again, with a building bill we have Master Builders Victoria and the Housing Industry Association saying, 'Hold on a minute, can we wait and actually have some meaningful consultation take place?' But no, that is not the case from the Allan Labor government. When we look at why this is an issue, this risks making homes more expensive to build. Master Builders Victoria warns that the combined weight of this bill and related reforms could add up to 30 per cent to construction.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge in the gallery Rob Molhoek, the member for Southport in the Parliament of Queensland.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Police resources

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Early on a Saturday morning a man approached two young women in their car and attacked their vehicle. The women drove to Reservoir police station seeking refuge only to find it closed. One of the women was subsequently slashed with a knife outside the police station. Why was it closed?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): It is deeply concerning to hear those experiences of what I acknowledge are too many victims of crime here in Victoria. It is from listening to those experiences of victims of crime that we have moved to strengthen the bail laws, introduce adult time for violent crime and bring about a new approach through the violence reduction unit to working with communities to prevent crime and support the work of Victoria Police. When it comes to the work of Victoria Police, I note that they are –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on debating the question, the Premier has not dealt with the substance, which was about why the station was closed – simple.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has 2 minutes and 18 seconds to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: In referring to the hard work of the men and women of Victoria Police, I was referring to the fact we do have the largest police force of any state or territory here in Australia and we have backed their work with billions of dollars of investment, new laws and powers, and new tools and resources. That is why we support the work of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police to have more police out on the streets –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on debating the question, for two days in a row, on any question relating to police station closures, the Premier has refused to debate the substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is in that context of supporting the operational decision-making of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police that we have supported the work of Operation Pulse, which is getting police and PSOs into shopping centres. It is also supporting the work of the chief commissioner to get more police out onto the streets. As the Leader of the Opposition should well know, operational decisions are a matter for the chief commissioner, not politicians.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): Months later, Reservoir police station remains closed at night. Why does the Premier claim police are resourced when Victoria Police say counters are closed due to resourcing challenges?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I will take my advice on how decisions are taken to best operationalise the largest police force in the nation from the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. We are supporting the work of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, who is working incredibly hard to get more police out onto the streets to prevent and respond to crime. We support the work of the chief commissioner in supporting the work of the men and women of Victoria Police, and I respect their operational decisions, which are based on data and intelligence, not on politicians.

Ministers statements: school digital devices policy

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:06): We all know Victorian education is leading the nation under Labor. We are the first in NAPLAN, we are the first in school builds and we are also the first state to ban mobile phones in classrooms. Any parent will tell you that there is a big disruptor on the loose right across Victoria, and it is not Moira, it is mobile phones. We know that getting screens out of classrooms helps students –

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members, if they are referring to members in this place or in the other place, to refer to them by their correct titles.

Ben CARROLL: We know that getting screens out of classrooms helps students learn, helps them to concentrate and also leads to calmer classrooms. That is why today, with the Premier, we announced that we are influencing and making sure our mobile phones ban goes to both public and private schools. We are also including more digital devices under the ban because students must focus on

learning. We want kids to have their education and have their childhoods back. That is why we are doing everything we can to support screens being out of the classroom – good for students, good for teachers and good for Victoria. You would think those opposite would be supporting a ban on screens. We know how much they hate screens; they will not even screen their candidates.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Very amusing, Minister. However, it was not appropriate. Members will come to order.

Ben CARROLL: When it comes to education, we never hear from the other side, because they know it is in their DNA to cut education. The Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer, to fill her $11.1 billion black hole, will go after our cost-of-living measures for education.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members on my left are warned. This disruptive behaviour in the chamber is unacceptable and will be treated as such – member for Brighton, member for Rowville, member for Polwarth, member for Narracan.

Police resources

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is to the Premier. A survey of Victoria Police members shows officers say they do not have the resources they need, yet yesterday the Premier rejected this. Are Victoria Police officers wrong, Premier?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): Our Labor government will always give Victoria Police the tools, the resources and the powers they need to keep the Victorian community safe. I note the reference that the Leader of the Opposition made to a survey. It spoke about the increased demand on Victoria Police to respond to mental health cases and to respond to family violence matters – two areas that we recognise are areas of importance because we held royal commissions into these matters. I note the recommendations of the mental health royal commission were not supported by the Liberal Party, and we all know what the former member for Burwood thought about the family violence royal commission.

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As part of supporting the work of Victoria Police, we respect Victoria Police, and the way you demonstrate that respect, in addition to providing resources to the largest police force in the nation and encouraging more people to join through the Made for More campaign and through additional resources and powers, is to respect the operational decisions of the Chief Commissioner of Police. I most certainly do respect the operational decisions that the chief commissioner is making. He is transforming the work of Victoria Police to get more police out onto the streets to respond to and to prevent crime. I saw that in Frankston just last week, when I was with the member for Frankston, talking to the men and women who work at the Frankston police station and hearing about the success of Operation Pulse, how they work in the Bayside shopping centre across the road and what a difference that is making in not just driving down crime in the Frankston area but keeping people safe. That comes from respecting the chief commissioner, not undermining him.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): Over two-thirds of police officers say government support for frontline police has fallen in the past two years. Why has support for frontline police fallen under the Premier's leadership?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): The statement made by the Leader of the Opposition is incorrect. Support has only increased for Victoria Police under our Labor government –

new laws backing them on getting dangerous weapons off the streets with the stop-and-search powers. Getting machetes off the streets is another example of an operational decision that was undermined –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals and the Leader of the Opposition will cease shouting across the table.

Jacinta ALLAN: An initiative that was brought to our government by Victoria Police to get dangerous weapons off the street has only been ridiculed and undermined by those opposite. But I tell you what, it has got thousands and thousands of dangerous weapons off the street. That is what backing Victoria Police looks like.

Ministers statements: festivals

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:14): As you know, Victoria is renowned for its great festivals. They are a key part of the reason that we are the cultural capital of the country: Melbourne Fringe; the international film festival; the jazz festival; Midsumma; the writers festival; the fashion festival, which my colleague the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events backs in; and the food and wine festival. And of course we have just released the program for our big winter arts festival Rising, which will warm up our winter.

If you have not noticed, we are in the middle of the comedy festival, and it is in its 40th year. I would like to share with the house some great parts of the program. I was going to see if the member for Croydon wanted to join me to see Mark Watson's show *20 Years of Doing My Absolute Bloody Best*. I think the member for Rowville should see John Peacock's *Mind the Generation Gap*. I do acknowledge some people are having a tough time at the moment, and when you are feeling down everyone needs a good laugh. I know the member for Kew might enjoy *How Could Hell Be Any Worse* by Rosco McClelland if she can fit it in amongst making calls. Last Sunday night we had a great show, not part of the official program, called 'Did You Know Dinesh Was Dodgy?' That show was for one night only. I understand the same performers will follow it up with a show called 'Get Phil', and I recommend the member for Hawthorn check out Sofie Hagen's show *I Think Some of This is My Fault*.

The Allan Labor government will keep backing our world-class festivals because we know they are a key part of our creative state. I want to thank the Liberal Party for their contribution to comedy.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. The member for Bulleen is back. The member for Bulleen is warned.

Police resources

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (14:16): My question is to the Premier. Residents of Sunhill Road in Glen Iris have been hit by nine criminal incidents in recent months, including four serious home invasions and carjackings in just one week. Why does the Premier claim police are resourced when the nearest station in Camberwell is closed at night and on weekends?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): In acknowledging and thanking the member for Hawthorn for his question, I again remind the member for Hawthorn of the detail I provided to the house earlier. We are giving Victoria Police the tools, the resources and the powers and we are backing it with new laws like adult time for violent crime, which specifically targets some of those offences that the member for Hawthorn raised. It comes from, if the member for Hawthorn does not mind me referring to them, the residents, his constituents, who he brought to Parliament last year and who the Attorney and I, with the member for Hawthorn, met with last year to hear directly from about their experience of a deeply traumatic home invasion that involved them and their kids. It is from listening

to families like that that we have introduced adult time for violent crime, dealing with and recognising this new type of behaviour that needed new responses.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I renew my point of order from earlier on debating the question. Every single question when we ask about police stations, the Premier debates the question and is evasive in refusing to deal with the substance of the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The Premier is not debating the question. She is addressing the question in its entirety, which she is entirely entitled to do.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: In addition to those new laws and tougher powers, we have also invested $4.5 billion in more police personnel, which has seen 3600 more police added into Victoria Police, which is why not only is it the largest police force in the country but Victoria's real recurrent police expenditure per person is higher than many other states, including New South Wales and Queensland. It is because we back the work of Victoria Police that there are more police officers. The chief commissioner, through the work he is doing based on data and intelligence, is getting those police officers out on the streets.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went to a police station being shut. How can it possibly be relevant for the Premier to keep reading the same talking points no matter what the question we ask is?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As part of the work of the chief commissioner in transforming Victoria Police, he is taking that resource, the largest police force in the nation, and ensuring that it is based on data and intelligence out on the streets, preventing and responding to crime. We will continue to back the operational decisions of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, because it is based on data and intelligence, not on politicians.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (14:20): Crime in Boroondara has risen by over 13 per cent in a year. At the same time, police numbers have fallen by 5 per cent. Why has the government failed to fill the 1500 vacancies on police rosters to keep Victorians safe?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): In regard to the question of vacancies that the member for Hawthorn referred to, I believe I did address this matter in part yesterday, but I am happy to provide this information again for the benefit of the member for Hawthorn. We do acknowledge that Victoria Police has a number of vacancies, a situation that is being experienced by policing forces around the country. It is why we have backed Victoria Police with funding for the Made for More campaign. It is why we are backing the work of the chief commissioner to put double shifts through the academy, and those efforts will work to fill those vacancies to get more people to come and join the largest police force in the nation.

Ministers statements: residential tenancies

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:21): The Allan Labor government is continuing to make renting fairer and more affordable in Victoria, and, building on more than 150 rental reforms already delivered, further changes commenced just yesterday. One critical reform requires additional factors to be considered when determining if a rent increase is excessive. Contrary to the claim by the Greens political party, your rent cannot go up by whatever your rental provider wants it to, because the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria and Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria can now compare the proposed rent to the increased rent, as well as the rate of increase compared to inflation, to decide if the rent increase is excessive. That means sharper oversight, it means fairer outcomes and it means more muscle in the system for renters.

It was no surprise that today the Greens political party attempted to mislead Victorian renters. Let me correct the record. The recent rental affordability report by realestate.com found that by some margin Victoria stands out as the most affordable state to rent. When we came to government, Victoria was the second-least affordable state to rent. It is now the most affordable, and that is not an accident; it is the product of a Labor government that is prepared to act. We know that renters are doing it tough, and we will continue to do the work. Very soon I will be announcing the launch date of the portable rental bond scheme.

The contrast could not be clearer. The Greens political party is still trying to pass off the same old bill as though reheating leftovers counts as fresh policy when all of the independent experts, including the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, say that it just will not work. It is only Labor who can be trusted to deliver for renters. The Greens political party do not have a seat at the table, and the Liberal–National–One Nation coalition will tear down these supports for renters.

Economic policy

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said:

> … as Victorian premier, I am determined to do everything that I can to ease cost of living pressures.

And Victorians welcome that commitment. But from 1 July the government will apply indexation across a wide range of government charges. Car registration, drivers licence fees and the emergency services levy will all increase, and so too will working with children checks and fees for core life events like birth, death and marriage certificates. Business registration fees, including liquor licences and building practitioner registrations, will increase – extra costs on struggling industries. These are not discretionary expenses; they are essential costs of living, working, running a business and participating in society, and they are all rising at once at a time when households and small businesses are already under immense pressure. Will the government cancel this year's indexation before it takes effect on 1 July?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): In acknowledging the member for Ringwood's question, I appreciate the acknowledgement that we are looking at doing everything we can to ease the cost-of-living pressures that were already very real for Victorian families and households, which is why we have been working hard on new solutions and approaches to make life easier and more affordable for Victorian families. This is a matter that I was discussing just last Wednesday when I was in Ringwood visiting the community health centre with local hardworking mum Rachel Halse, and we were having an important conversation with the staff at the community health centre in Ringwood about our free virtual women's health service. This is yet another example of listening to the concerns and pressures of cost of living, which are very real for families, and looking at new ways of delivering care for people. We are hearing reports that the rising cost of fuel is putting pressure on families around making choices about what they do and do not do. We know they are looking at deferring essential health care. Well, through our virtual women's health facility, delivered through the community health centre –

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very specific about a specific measure, and I asked the Premier to address whether or not that measure will be contemplated.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the matter. The question was relating to cost of living.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am using this as an opportunity to talk about the virtual women's health service, because I want more women to know that this service is available, particularly for women in rural and regional Victoria, because what women can do is they can, for free, get medical help and advice on pelvic pain, on abortion care, on contraception care, on all of the range of health services that women need. They can go and get that for free through the virtual women's health centre. It is not just rural and regional women this will support; it will support women in the suburbs as well. This is one example of many of how we are looking at levers to support families and to ease those cost-of-living

pressures. And, yes, we will continue to examine measures to ease the affordability challenges we know families and working people are experiencing.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:27): Will the Premier share with the house why she is unable to make a commitment around indexation on 1 July?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28): As I said in my earlier answer, we are examining ways that we can continue to ease the cost-of-living pressures that are very real. It is from listening to young mums like Rachel Halse, like I was last week, who was talking to me about the challenges of two young kids and having to travel for work, and understanding the pressures that are real about having to pay for groceries and meet the mortgage – listening to mums like Rachel – that we are going to continue to act and continue to support hardworking families.

Ministers statements: sentencing reform

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:28): The Allan Labor government is banning the use of so-called good-character references as a mitigating factor in sentencing. If you are guilty of a crime – any crime – you will no longer be able to rely on claims about your good character to reduce your sentence. Someone does not have good character if they are being sentenced for rape. Someone does not have good character if they are being sentenced for child sexual abuse. Victim-survivors should never have to sit in court and hear the person who harmed them described as a good person, a pillar of the community, someone of integrity or someone who made a one-off mistake. To hear those words at that moment compounds trauma, diminishes the harm done and undermines confidence in our justice system. Personal standing, professional status or community connections should never be seen to lessen the seriousness of offending. That is why under our changes courts will no longer consider evidence of good character as a mitigating factor in sentencing, and we are listening.

At a time when victim-survivors are asking to be heard, it is deeply concerning when anyone, especially someone seeking election to this place, chooses to vouch for the good character of someone convicted of some of the most serious offences, like the sexual assault of a child. Others may seek to excuse this or cover it up; this Labor government will not. We are focused on changes that make life safer and fairer for all Victorians and that centre victim-survivors. On this side of the house, it is the Victorian people who are at the top of our ticket, and that is where they will stay.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I make available to the house a reference from Kelvin Thomson supporting Tony Mokbel, which may be helpful for the Attorney-General.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Sandringham.

Crime

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:31): My question is to the Premier. Late last year a 21-year-old stabbed two retail workers with a syringe in Mildura during a 10-day crime spree. She was charged and released on bail. After breaching bail she appeared again before the court, which was told the accused displayed a comprehensive 'failure to comply with bail conditions'. Despite the magistrate acknowledging her breaches and the risk she would offend again, she was bailed yet again. Why are there no consequences for people who repeatedly breach bail in Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): The member for Mildura referred to what was no doubt a tremendously traumatic experience for people in the Mildura community in terms of being victims of the terrible crimes that she has outlined, and it is from listening to victims of crime and accepting that these crimes need to be addressed that we have strengthened the bail laws.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, no matter what we ask the Premier, she reads out talking points which are the same response to every question and do not deal with the question that is asked.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, that is not a point of order. The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time. We will give the Premier an opportunity to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is disappointing that the member for Brighton does not want to hear about how this week the final stage of our tougher bail laws has come into effect. They have come into effect because we have listened to victims of crime, like those outlined by the member for Mildura. We have been strengthening the bail laws, and what this means is that under these second-strike rules people who are on bail and commit an indictable offence will face tougher consequences. This follows the strengthening of the bail laws that we passed through the Parliament, at different stages opposed by those opposite, and what we are now seeing is that the number of people in remand is up by more than 70 per cent.

But we know that we need to continue to listen to victims of crime, to support the work of Victoria Police and also, most critically, through the work of the violence reduction unit, to look at new ways of getting in and preventing crime, working with young people particularly and understanding that there are new patterns of behaviour here. They are unacceptable, but we do need to recognise there are a range of reasons for this. Keeping these young kids connected to community, to faith, to culture, to schools and to families is how we get in and have the interventions. This is a program that has worked in London and has worked in Glasgow, and we have introduced it here in Victoria because we –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bulleen, this is your last warning.

Jacinta ALLAN: The mocking of toughening bail laws and preventing crime exposes the Liberal–National outfit as so not being focused on Victorians.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went directly to the government's revolving door bail system, and the Premier has strayed very far from that question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to return to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was referring to the work of the violence reduction unit, which is getting in there and working with the community safety officers in schools, working with Victoria Police and working with communities to prevent crime. That is something that should be supported, not mocked like it is by those opposite.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:35): Premier, the accused appeared in court again, where she was bailed for a third time. She went on to allegedly commit another violent crime. How are victims of these crimes meant to feel safe when violent perpetrators are repeatedly released back into the community?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:36): Again, the member for Mildura has not provided the details of the dates, and I refer to the fact that as of yesterday our second-strike bail rules have come into effect, which means tougher consequences for people who commit –

Jade Benham: On a point of order, Speaker, on being factual in the chamber, I have actually spoken about and raised this particular matter in this chamber twice previously to this.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: We will continue to work with Victoria Police and continue to support the work of the violence reduction unit as well. This is critical work. It is hard work. It is challenging work. And it comes from listening to victims of crime, bringing in new measures like police in retail centres and looking at new initiatives that were announced this week, like ram raids being now recognised as aggravated burglary. There are a number of actions that we have taken, and we will continue to act to support the work of Victoria Police.

Ministers statements: cost of living

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:37): Yesterday afternoon I spent some time at Parliament station and had the opportunity to speak to a whole range of passengers on our great public transport system about what free public transport means to them. Do you know what Victorians told me? The answer was simple. It might be ridiculed by those opposite, but it was simple: it takes the pressure off. I had a young nursing student from Victoria University tell me that it gave him room to breathe in his week. He was not scrambling around for those last few dollars in the bottom of his bag, working out whether he could afford to catch the train. Another person told me about how it meant that they could have some more money to do things with their kids, to pay the grocery bills. These are things that worry parents all around the state. It means being able to do a proper shop at the grocery while you are watching every single dollar. Also I heard from people who would normally drive into the city. They are catching public transport because we have made it free. This is a little bit of help, but it is making a real difference because it does not just save money – and it does save money – it also helps take the pressure off.

It is not the only measure that we are working on to make life a little bit easier for families. We are making working from home a right because it saves time and money. We are improving public transport so people can get home to their families sooner. We are building more homes in places that families want to live and can afford to live, near train stations and near jobs. And we are helping families with school costs, whether it is free dental, free public transport or help with uniforms. We know there are some who are opposed to giving people back time in their day, opposed to getting young people into their first home, opposed to getting Victorians home safer and sooner. Victorians know it is only Labor that is looking to make life easier and more affordable.

Constituency questions

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:40): (1598) My question is to the Minister for Health. Many residents in my electorate of Lowan must travel hundreds of kilometres to Melbourne, Ballarat or Geelong to access essential health care. With little access to public transport, they have no choice but to drive. The Victorian patient transport assistance scheme has failed to keep up with soaring fuel prices. I am hearing from constituents who are delaying or even skipping medical appointments because they simply cannot afford the trip. This is the cruel and harsh reality of the fuel crisis feeding into a cost-of-living crisis and then a medical crisis. When will the government increase VPTAS payments so regional Victorians can access the care they need?

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:41): (1599) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. As many in this place know, there are parts of my electorate that are in desperate need of accessible public transport. The announcement of additional buses in Kororoit in the budget was a very welcome announcement. Residents are very keen for these buses to be operational. Can the minister provide an update on the timeline for delivery and commencement of the announced bus route 140 connecting Rockbank, Mount Atkinson and Grandview?

The SPEAKER: Member for Kororoit, could you rephrase your question to be a question? An update is an action.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: Can the minister provide the timeline for delivery and commencement of the announced bus route 140 connecting Rockbank, Mount Atkinson and Grandview?

The SPEAKER: Do you mean 'What is the timeline for the upgrade?'

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: That is exactly what I was going to say, Speaker: what is the timeline?

The SPEAKER: That is what I thought.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:42): (1600) My question is to the Minister for Health. In 2025 the Sandringham Hospital in my community was provided a Medicare-eligible MRI licence by the federal Labor government but without the resourcing to actually provide an MRI machine. Unfortunately, almost a year later the hospital has not received funding from the state Labor government for an MRI machine to be installed there. An MRI machine at the Sandringham Hospital would, in my view, reduce the need for our community to travel to this service, making things easier for local working families, the elderly and those suffering from chronic illness. It would also help ease the burden of our under-the-pump healthcare systems right across the Bayside communities and beyond. The hospital has the licence but it does not have the machine. So I ask the minister: when will the Allan Labor government invest in our Sandringham Hospital so that locals have access to the MRI services that the hospital is already licensed for?

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:43): (1601) My constituency question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, how will the new Ballarat youth prevention and recovery care centre benefit young people in my electorate of Wendouree? I am pleased to see that work is well underway on the new 10-bed Ballarat YPARC, one of four new centres being delivered across regional Victoria as part of the Allan government's mental health reform agenda. Importantly, YPARCs directly respond to key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and will provide voluntary 24/7 residential support for young people aged 16 to 25. Designed as a home away from home, the Ballarat YPARC will offer early intervention care that helps prevent the need for acute hospital admissions. Given the significant mental health needs of young people in Ballarat and the surrounding community, I look forward to developing my understanding of how our new YPARC will improve outcomes for young people across Ballarat.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:44): (1602) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the minister and the Department of Transport and Planning undertake a formal safety review of the dangerous intersections at Joelson Avenue and Stud Road, and Evans Street and Stud Road, in Scoresby? Rowville electorate constituents have contacted my office with serious safety concerns regarding these busy local feeder road intersections that provide entry and exit to Scoresby Secondary College from Stud Road. These concerns have only heightened following the tragic fatality of an 11-year-old girl last October at the nearby High Street Road and Wallace Road intersection, which I raised in the house in November last year. My constituents do not want to see another local tragedy. We urgently seek a formal safety review of these intersections, specifically requesting consideration of traffic signals, a road safety audit and a specific clear zone at Joelson Avenue to allow motorists to exit safely onto Stud Road.

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:45): (1603) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Boral's Montrose quarry is seeking expansion. Recently, as part of the process, an environment effects statement has been required to be produced by Boral by the Minister for Planning. My constituents are concerned about the proposed expansion and the potential impacts on human health, including but not limited to dust, for residents and children attending local schools in close proximity. My question for the Minister for Environment is: how will the impact on human health be assessed and evaluated as part of the process of Boral's application?

South Barwon electorate

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:46): (1604) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. I welcome the government's announcement of free public transport for the month of April. I certainly know many of my constituents very much look forward to

being able to use the public transport options from Geelong, particularly into Melbourne. Many Victorians, however, live in growth corridors, and growth corridors can often be public transport deserts, with governments often taking years to deliver those bus services. So my question is: when will the government take the opportunity to bring forward public bus options to ensure that during this crisis Victorians can get to their work?

Werribee electorate

John LISTER (Werribee) (14:47): (1605) My question is for the Minister for Local Government. How can Local Government Victoria restore confidence in the governance of Wyndham City Council? Since I was elected last year I have raised concerns, both publicly and privately, regarding councillor conduct. Residents have continued to raise concerns with me about the conduct of various councillors and decisions made by council that are perceived to favour one part of the municipality over others. I have also called for the return of state government funding for projects that council does not deliver. The partisan response at the time from the then mayor was extraordinary to say the least. There was a recent suspension of another former mayor only last month, using the Labor government's new rules around councillor conduct. We now face another crisis of confidence, with the current mayor Preet Singh revealed to have provided a good character reference to a person found guilty of child abuse. This Labor government has committed to banning these sorts of references in court. Many constituents have contacted me expressing their desire that he step down, not just step aside.

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:50): (1606) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: does the government have any plans to offer Commonwealth seniors health card holders the vehicle registration concession? While pension concession card holders currently receive a 50 per cent reduction in vehicle registration, self-funded retirees who are equally impacted by cost-of-living pressures receive nothing. Extending similar support would provide meaningful relief to this often forgotten group of retirees.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:48): (1607) My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. How can the Victorian government continue to support local communities in celebrating their diversity and supporting inclusion? Recently we celebrated Cultural Diversity Week. It was a great opportunity to recognise the many cultures that make up the community I represent in Geelong's northern suburbs. Through the week I joined the wonderful Northern Bay school community, who hosted their annual celebration of cultural diversity with a Harmony Week event for the whole community to attend. In the lead-up to the event it was very special to see video messages on the school's Facebook page, where students spoke in many different languages, inviting the community to be part of the celebrations. It was such an inclusive approach to ensuring everyone feels welcome attending the event. We have the most warm and welcoming multicultural community in the Lara electorate, and events like Harmony Day are such a terrific reflection of that.

Cindy McLeish: I have a point of order, Speaker, with regard to the content of answers, possibly in breach of standing order 58, with regard to questions on notice, which I have lodged with the Deputy Premier and Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. The questions that I asked were very detailed, asking for a specific dollar amount, and the response was a line to say, 'This is available in the annual report,' which is not true. The reason I asked those questions is because it is not in the annual report. If I refer to standing order 58, it says the answers to the questions must be direct, factual and succinct. This is not factual. This is not the first time that it has happened, so I seek your guidance, Speaker, about whether the minister can be directed to answer those questions properly.

The SPEAKER: Member for Eildon, I am not familiar with that question or the answer. I am happy to have a conversation with you outside of the chamber.

Annabelle Cleeland: Speaker, I have a point of order relating to overdue questions. I have several overdue, and these relate to the portfolios of environment, education, the Premier, police, housing and building, public and active transport, health and ambulance services. They are extensive in how delayed they are and they are really important to my community, so could you please ask them to do their job?

The SPEAKER: Could you hand your list to the clerks, please, member for Euroa. I remind members that points of order around unanswered questions are not to be used as an opportunity to make a statement to the house.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:51): I have reviewed the constituency questions from yesterday. The member for Brighton asked two questions for his constituency question. The first question was a broad policy question, although the member did sufficiently link the question to his constituents. The second question, posed near the end of his remarks, sought an opinion by asking the Premier to make a judgement on a proposition. Guidelines for questions from *Rulings from the Chair*, page 143, state that questions should not seek an opinion. Members should not ask two or more questions during constituency questions if those questions are different in substance. I therefore rule the member's constituency question out of order for asking two questions and for seeking an opinion. The member for Footscray asked the minister to provide her with a letter. This is a request for an action, and I rule it out of order. The member for Richmond asked the minister whether a practice she described was legal. As I have noted, guidelines for questions state that questions should not seek an opinion, particularly a legal opinion, from ministers. I therefore rule the question out of order.

Questions must seek information about policy, public administration and the actions of government departments for which ministers are responsible to the house. Rather than seek an opinion from the minister, members seeking information about the implementation or effect of a policy or legislation should phrase their questions in a way to elicit factual or measurable information rather than ask the minister to express a view on a matter that is debatable or subject to interpretation or that can only be resolved in the courts.

Bills

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:52): I rise to return to speaking on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. I was in the middle of my contribution, with 6 minutes left to go, and will speak now about, again, the lack of consultation that has taken place and thereby support the Shadow Minister for Housing and Building and Shadow Minister for Planning on his reasoned amendment, which has come from within the industry, from the Housing Industry Association as well as Master Builders Victoria, who have called for a delay or deferral of this bill until further consultation with the industry takes place. This is because Master Builders has warned us that the combined weight of this bill and related reforms could add up to 30 per cent to construction costs – 30 per cent in a state where housing affordability is already at breaking point. This is a risk we cannot afford to take without proper scrutiny and without proper consultation, as the industry is asking for. Industry has referred again to this state, where 43 per cent of the cost of a new home in a greenfield area is attributed to government levies, taxes and charges – almost 50 per cent of a new home that a Victorian would build in a greenfield area – and the industry quote that is going to cost another 30 per cent in addition to this. Another major risk raised by the industry, if only the government had consulted, is that the regulator is simply not ready.

This bill creates the new regulator. It formally abolishes the Victorian Building Authority and replaces it with the Building and Plumbing Commission, the BPC, a single body that controls licensing, enforcement, insurance, dispute resolution and disciplinary action all under one roof. But the reality is that the BPC cannot manage its workload already. Licence renewals sit unanswered for months, and there are builders with construction on hold. Consumer reviews of the BPC are damning, and giving it sweeping new powers before it can handle what it already has in terms of workload is not reform, it is risk. I took the liberty of looking up the Building and Plumbing Commission online and the Google reviews for which it is rated one star. Here are some of the reviews from the people using the BPC, who have given story after story of their personal experience of the delays and the inability of the BPC to even do its job currently. A person online said:

> Our builder has been waiting for his license renewal to be issued since October last year. Construction is on hold because of this. BPC, please provide an answer.

Joel, another builder, said there are:

> To many confusing layers staff not very helpful doing the run around again. VBA have just rebranded to BPC same stuff around. Very disappointing.

These are the people trying to build homes for Victorians to get into. Another person said:

> These people are the same if not worse than the VBA. More power … more like more people getting paid tax payers money to do sweet …

stuff all. I will not read the actual wording here.

> Hours on hold only to be told you can't speak to the departments needed … The BPC is going to be no different to the VBA apart from more red tape, longer wait times and more frustrations for all.

These are damning reviews for the new regulator, which the government is trying to then give more work to. Doesn't it just speak of the government's challenges that the government is so under-resourced that it would overload the BPC, which already is not performing its core functions? That, to me, is just unbelievable.

Every change the government makes that touches the building industry needs to have a crystal-clear focus on increasing homes. Yet we know that under this government the data is there that Victoria is building fewer homes now than a decade ago, in 2014. Under this government, the Allan Labor government, we have built less homes than in any year since 2014. It is a decade of home building. After a decade of Labor in government, home building has gone backwards in Victoria.

The government set itself this 80,000-homes-a-year target, and yet we have seen that they have fallen well short of that, not to mention that dwelling approvals collapsed 32.2 per cent in December 2025, more than double the national decline. This is not a national trend landing on Victoria; this is a Victorian problem made by this Allan Labor government, who have made it too hard, too slow and too expensive to build in Victoria.

In the short time that I have left, when we look at what is happening in the growth areas, speaking already of the greenfield areas, the 27 new suburbs already identified to be planned, land set aside for up to 180,000 new homes is now stuck in a planning system so slow that it takes up to 10 years to plan a new suburb – not to build it but to plan it – when it used to take two. In fact we had a group of builders in Parliament just this week. We have heard from them, and they said – straight from industry's mouth – that the government has spent years in this ideological pursuit of demonising greenfield housing, talking up density in established suburbs while treating new outer suburbs as a second-best option. This is coming from the builders themselves: that the government have demonised greenfield areas where people want to live, where young families want to live, where young families want to build their homes, build a backyard for their families and their kids to grow up in. Yet the government has demonised it. This is coming from industry themselves, and that is why we have a plan and why the coalition are committed to unlocking these areas – to not slow up but fast-track the precinct structure plans – *(Time expired)*

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:59): It is a pleasure to rise and speak today on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. In the short amount of time that I have been in this place I have spoken quite a bit on different reforms that we have undertaken in the housing sector and the building sector, and it really is about modernising and keeping pace with all the changes that we do see across the building sector. We do it all the time with all different pieces of legislation. But this is not just a bill to talk about in this place; it has real intent and it is a statement of intent, I believe. We know that when people make the huge investment of building their home – it may be their first home, their second home or whatever it is, or renovating – and they save all that money and they are planning for their future, they should get the product that they deserve and have been promised.

They need to have confidence in the quality and confidence in the builder that they have, but also they deserve to feel safe. We know that it is a big investment to build. I am lucky that I have a husband who is in a trade; he is a plumber, and it is an excellent trade to have. I hear a lot about the industry at home from him – he teaches apprentices now – and the amount of apprentices that are proudly building our state, maybe in construction in a domestic sense or in a commercial sense. We have an incredible amount of work on the go. Those new apprentices coming out will have to learn the new regulations and learn the new ways of doing things. We do not do the same things we did 30 years ago when he was first a plumber and his father was a plumber as well – it is in the family – and we need to keep reforming our legislation to keep up with those changes.

When someone saves and saves to invest in a home or a renovation and they see corners are cut or standards are slipping and there is no accountability, those are just very personal and devastating outcomes. That is why this bill is really important. It does signify that we are doing a significant overhaul of our building system here in this state. These reforms that we are doing are really looking at old legislation and the framework that was established many years ago – over 30 years ago. These industries are changing, as I have indicated.

The introduction of this bill also provides a clear, modern and consistent framework to administer and enforce Victoria's building legislation. That framework is about strengthening regulatory oversight and really improving how that entire building system is operating. It replaces outdated provisions that are scattered across multiple acts, and it is about bringing in efficiencies. It does clarify and strengthen, as I said, the regulatory powers and responsibilities, improving monitoring, compliance and enforcement, and it does ensure that administration arrangements and those enforcement tools are consistent. It is about creating a stronger, fairer and more predictable framework. Part of that is the establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission, a regulator designed to oversee the system but also to actively uphold its integrity.

But at the centre of it, this is about people. It is about people that are looking to build or to renovate. It is about putting consumers back at the centre of the building system, where they should have always been. For too long, it has been a pretty complex system to navigate – chasing rectifications and bearing the cost of poor workmanship – and this bill is aiming to change that. It introduces, for the first time, clear and overarching objectives for the entire building system that place health and safety front and centre, not as an afterthought and not as a secondary consideration but as the fundamental principles that will guide the entire system. It is really important that it comes with that strength and that critical regulation, and the Building and Plumbing Commission will have stronger, clearer powers to monitor compliance.

I have heard in this place a lot of people talking about and sharing their building stories, and sometimes it goes extremely well. In my case we have built a new home, and it has gone extremely well. We have had an incredible builder that has talked to us the whole way through the build and contracts, and we thank him for his dedication to providing us with a wonderful home. But it does not always go as smoothly as that. I understand it can be quite a stressful situation to be in, but it is about preventing that in the first place. We do not want to be getting to where we are responding to problems; we want to prevent them in the first place.

Where we do have deliberate wrongdoing, this bill is really about ensuring that there are consequences. There is the introduction of a new civil penalty regime which will allow significant financial penalties that act as a general deterrent to serious noncompliance. These are not meant to be token measures; these are designed to ensure that cutting corners is no longer profitable for builders and that disregard for safety is no longer tolerated. Equally, we need a system that backs builders and plumbers who are already doing the right thing as well – a system that is clear and that is consistent so that they are not going to be undercut by those who ignore the rules. I have seen this also firsthand in my own community. As I have said, we have got many skilled and hardworking builders and tradespeople across the Bellarine who take an immense amount of pride in the work that they do. I know that those builders are building not just houses but homes for families in our region. They are locals, they employ locals and they train our local apprentices. They certainly contribute to the fabric of our community, and they want to do the right thing – and they do – but they also want to know that their system is going to be fair for them so when they invest their time and effort into delivering that high-quality work, they are not competing against the operators who are, as I have heard others describe, dodgy operators who do cut corners and ignore standards and walk away from their responsibilities.

I just want to talk a little bit about one section of the bill. We know that it does back those good operators, but one of those other things that I hear from my local constituents – and I hear it in the media as well – is about those who do not take accountability. We need to make sure that those who do the wrong thing are held to account. This bill does go to one of the most damaging practices I think I have seen in an industry, which is phoenixing. For too long we have seen that operators hide behind those company structures. They walk away from their defective work. They can leave their customers to pick up the pieces, and it is completely unacceptable. Phoenixing is about where you may start with one company, start a business, and you cut corners and you are in financial trouble. They stop, they go bankrupt and they go and start another company in a different name. That is when they are failing to comply with any emergency orders or building orders or directions to fix.

The Building and Plumbing Commission, which I have talked about, will have the power to issue a declared director notice, which will make directors personally responsible for ensuring those obligations are met. This is a big reform. It means that those directors cannot simply walk away from their responsibilities, and it creates a direct incentive for companies to comply with those orders and do the right thing in the first place. At the same time it is also about putting fairness back into it, and it allows directors to seek a review when they were not involved in management or took reasonable steps to ensure compliance. Where there is serious wrongdoing, particularly where there are health and safety issues, we need to make sure that those people are going to be accountable for those actions. This bill draws a line, really, under that phoenixing practice. It protects those consumers, supports the honest operators and obviously strengthens the integrity of the entire industry.

We know these reforms are really essential to achieving our broader housing objectives, and it really matters that we get this system right. It is something that we are continuing to work on, because that is something that we are seeing even across the Bellarine. With our growing communities and new developments families are choosing the Bellarine as a place to call home, and we want to make sure that they have a building and a home that they can be proud of and live in for a very long time. Really, this bill is about strengthening that confidence in doing that. It is not about just building more but also building better.

In conclusion, I would wrap this bill up, I suppose, as being about trust – trust in our building industry, trust in the system, trust in the standards and trust that Victorians are going to get the home that they have purchased. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:09): I rise to say some words on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. As the member for Bellarine just articulated, there need to be some works to make sure that builders and plumbers and so forth are complying, because there are issues across the building area. I do not know her husband, but he must be a good bloke because

he is a plumber, like me; I reckon we would be able to sit down and have a beer or two across the journey.

There are a couple of issues within the bill. The member for Narracan, who spoke previously, pointed out a couple of glaring issues within the bill. There are some okay parts in it, but one of the huge parts which is getting a lot of pushback from the building industry and the building fraternity and mum-and-dad builders – who are contacting us to say we need to raise this issue because it is a huge red flag – is the minimum financial requirement for builders. In short, it could be set up to wipe out our builders workforce. The reason I say that is that for our smaller builders, our mums and dads that put their blood, sweat and tears into the industry to build new houses for the people of Victoria, they need to have this minimum financial requirement, whether that requirement is $1 million or $5 million or $10 million. The way that it will work now is that if you are building a house and it is worth, as the member for Narracan said, $500,000 and your limit is $1 million, when that house is completed – it used to come off the register, as such, so you could then move on to the next house – it will have to stay as a requirement in your threshold and what you can afford and what you can get insurance and so forth for. It could be cutting the capacity of a small builder who may build four houses a year nowadays, with the length of time it takes to build a house, down to two houses, because of this particular part of the bill, which I think needs to be looked at.

It has been flagged by the industry. We had two weeks to put this out and get the building industry to have a look at it and come back with their concerns, and come back they have, because two weeks is not long enough for them to go through it and talk with us and talk with the building industry and their clientele, who are the builders that are building the houses. When these red flags were raised, they came in a rush. It was not just one red flag; it was multiple red flags, because the people that are on the ground having to build and construct housing right across Victoria, whether it is in the regions or whether it is here in the city, know that this is going to be a huge issue moving forward. We cannot afford as a state to have builders walk away and go and build houses in other states around Australia because we are strapping more red tape and more financial burden to their backs.

I was having a chat to a mum and a dad who are plumbers in the Latrobe Valley and talking about the cost of running a business at the moment here in Victoria. We all know times are tough and materials are going up. We have got a fuel crisis at the moment, which is exploding how much PVC costs, whether you are doing PVC pipes or conduits, if you are in an electrical trade. To have that stock of material that you need to put in the ground to build houses – it just continues to rise all the time. So there is that part. But talking with Ashley and Sarah, in their plumbing business they have four tradespeople that work there, and they have got to pay $9500 for public liability this year. There are a lot of insurers that are now just refusing to insure small businesses because of the compliance that is needed to run these businesses. I said, 'Well, how much has that gone up from last year?' They told me and showed me the figures. They had it on their paperwork: the premium had increased 198 per cent from last year.

This is a small business in regional Victoria that is doing the right thing and employing other individuals from regional areas to give them a job. But before they can even start to work they have got to have public liability, and when it jumps in one year by 198 per cent, alarm bells are ringing everywhere for this small business. How are they going to come up with that money? Then they said their WorkCover insurance has jumped to $16,000 this year. So they have got nearly $26,000 in WorkCover and public liability that they have got to bankroll themselves. It is a huge issue right across the regions. We cannot even then put a value on the amount of hours of paperwork that a mum and dad running their small business in the building industry need to do to get invoices out and to get money back in. There is that continual stress level.

You have only got to talk to people in the building fraternity – it does not matter if it is builders, plumbers, electricians or if it is the painters painting the house or if it is a tiler that is putting tiles on the floor or on the walls – to know that cashflow is the key for any business to keep the doors open. Sometimes if you are just a single operator, you can wear that, but when you have four other people

in your business, they are relying hopefully on you to provide the works and move forward for them to have a job so they can go about living their lives. The stress comes onto owners, who probably have not done a business degree because they are in the trades and they learn on the job – that is what you do when you are a tradie; you learn on the job. The amount of pressure and stress, moving right across the board, from building houses in Victoria is really hard.

Then we have the developers that are trying to unlock land supplies in the Latrobe Valley. Obviously we are surrounded by three major coalmines, and coal overlays are a huge issue down in and around the area at the moment. These are coal overlays that are 40, 50 years old and which are no longer relevant. They are just there and are holding up shovel-ready developments of thousands of houses, virtually, from starting.

In the building industry there is a lot at play. As I said, we do not want to burn out the actual workers that bring these houses to life and that bring these dreams to life for people that are building a new house. Whether it be anywhere in the regions or whether it be here building multistorey housing in the city, we do not want to burn them out. It is getting to a point where the older generation that are moving towards retirement – and they might be five, eight, 10 years away from retiring – are seriously looking at what their best option is: 'Is my best option to keep going? Do I still want that stress? Do I still want that burden of doing the right thing, complying everywhere, paying insurance and paying WorkCover premiums?' It is right across the board, so my biggest concern with this building legislation that we are debating here today is having small mum-and-dad businesses thinking it is all too hard and walking away. I hope it is not the case. We have a reasoned amendment, which has been put up by the member for Caulfield and which I support, to get it right. Have a look at it. Do not put the pressure on these people. They are raising the flags and there is an issue, and we seriously need to look at it.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:19): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. I have heard from quite a few members in this chamber today that there would not be many of us that have not had constituents coming to us about dodgy builders and what they have been left with. Certainly in a climate of cost-of-living challenges, that is the last thing we want families to have to endure – having the experience of a dodgy builder. There are many, many stories out there, and I think this bill gives consumers confidence that they will actually get the high standards and the quality that meet the requirements of their new home, particularly around safety. We do not want people feeling unsafe in their homes, and unfortunately, with some of these dodgy builders, that is exactly what they have experienced – that it is not safe to stay in their own home and they have to move out and find alternative accommodation because it is not safe to live in the their dream home that they have spent a long time aiming for. There are serious repercussions to dodgy work that has been done by builders, and of course they should have the right to get the outcome that they have paid for. As I said, many constituents who have had experience with dodgy builders end up in serious financial consequences as a result of this, so this is a really important bill. Given that cost of living is putting pressure on family budgets, we will continue to provide housing but also enable housing developments to ensure that we do have adequate housing close to trains and jobs, which is what this government has been working towards.

I think it is interesting that the opposition keep blocking us on consumer-focused reforms that protect working people. We hear them again today making up lots of different stories about why this bill is not going to work. I think it is something that is really important to ensure that our constituents have every confidence that this sort of bill is there to protect them, to protect their rights and for them to get what they paid for.

I also want to note that, yes, these building companies are small businesses and there are many good builders in our communities. I know in my electorate of Geelong – and I heard the member for Bellarine talking about the builder that built her home and how good he was, or she was; I am not sure whether it was a male or a female – we have some exceptional builders that go out of their way to make sure that they deliver the best quality for their clients, or for the consumers in that case. Those builders also do not want their industry to have a bad reputation.

When the opposition talk about a lack of consultation, I find that really interesting, because there are about 50 builders in my electorate of Geelong alone that have been talking to the department about this bill and having input into that, because they were not necessarily happy with the representation they had at state level. They are really onto this bill and are very much aware of the content of and the rationale for the bill. They all provide a high-quality level of work. They are not the ones that are to be held in question here. They are not dodgy builders; they are good builders, and they do not want their reputation being tarnished by dodgy builders. They also underquote. These people will often do lower quotes but not complete the work or not complete the work to the requirements. The builders in my electorate are pretty happy with the consultation they have had, and I do want to thank the department for their work with those Geelong builders. In saying that, they have also indicated to me that there are builders all around the state that want to make sure that this bill is right and fit for purpose for the work that they do. I am aware that they are happy with the consultation that they have had.

Of course we are building more houses in Victoria. We have the most first home buyers in Victoria. Again, it is really important to make sure that this bill gives those people the confidence that when they are appointing a builder to build their home or apartment or whatever it might be, it will be built to the quality and standard that it should be but also in a safe way. As I said, the builders in my electorate and, I am sure, right across this state are really proud of the work that they do and will continue to deliver good work, and hopefully this will get rid of those shoddy builders that are making it far more difficult for the building industry.

This bill is first and foremost about protecting consumers. The affordability and availability of housing is one of the most pressing issues we face today, and the single biggest investment most Victorians will make in their lifetimes is their home. As I said earlier, it would be absolutely devastating to be building a home, only to find out that it is not the quality that it should be or as safe as it should be and actually you do not end up with your dream home that you have been aiming for for a very long time. But this bill delivers more protections for Victorians by establishing a trusted regulator that will improve culture in the building and plumbing industry by providing a credible threat to remove rogue operators. This means more building and plumbing work done right the first time, fewer defects, and proactive certification of any defects or noncompliant building work that does occur. So it is reassuring to those building their home that this bill outlines what the requirements are. These reforms rightly protect consumers, placing them at the heart of the system, and industry will also benefit from more certainty and improved productivity. With clear pathways to identify and rectify any defects, builders and plumbers doing the right thing will benefit, while those doing the wrong thing will be held to account. The bill supports the government's housing objectives by reinforcing consumer confidence and supporting the construction of high-quality and well-built homes.

This bill represents the most comprehensive overhaul of the system since the Building Act 1993 was introduced over 30 years ago, so it is clearly due for a change. I know in my community and, I am sure, in many other communities across Victoria that those people that have had the unfortunate experience of having a dodgy build will very much welcome this legislation. The main reforms in the bill include a new public interest objective, which will require builders to put health and safety at the centre of every build. This is the first time a common objective will apply across the entire system. Under the bill the objective of the building system is to promote and protect the health and safety of building occupants and the public.

Building or buying a home is the single biggest investment most working Victorians will make in their entire lifetimes. Families deserve to have confidence that work will be done right the first time. That is why the bill gives the Building and Plumbing Commission strong new powers to protect consumers and ensure dodgy builders face consequences. I think the ultimate purpose of this bill, in my conversations with consumers and with builders, is that there are consequences for that shoddy work. People want to feel confident that when they go through that process of appointing a builder – and I am sure many people are very much aware of needing to look at who the builders are and what their history is – if there are any issues around dodgy work and safety issues, there are avenues for that to

be dealt with. It is really important that we continue to improve the consumer protections in our legislation and in particular around building new homes for Victorians.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:29): I rise to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. Whilst the government presents this as a tidy administrative consolidation, the reality is very different. This is not a minor reinstatement of existing laws; it is a sweeping overhaul of the entire regulatory framework. It centralises power, expands enforcement, increases penalties and imposes new financial compliance burdens across the industry. And it is being rushed. Industry has not been given the time or clarity needed to properly assess these changes. Key stakeholders, including Master Builders Victoria and the Housing Industry Association, are critical. This bill goes much further than advertised and requires proper consultation before it goes any further or proceeds through the upper house, and that has not happened. Instead we are seeing a familiar pattern: big reform, big promises and very little groundwork.

At the centre of this bill is the creation of a new regulator, the Building and Plumbing Commission, replacing the Victorian Building Authority. The government claims this new body will restore confidence and improve enforcement, but there is a fundamental problem. The system has not failed because of lack of government power; it has failed because of poor oversight, inconsistent enforcement and lack of accountability. Yet the government's answer is simply to concentrate even more power into a single regulator.

The bill gives the commission broad powers of entry, inspection and investigation. It expands civil penalties and introduces significant new liabilities, including personal liability for company directors. It allows for suspension, cancellation and disqualification of practitioners, in some cases before matters are fully resolved. That is not about reform, that is about power. The bill also introduces a minimum financial requirement framework, again with the intention of improving consumer protection. But industry has been clear: insolvency in construction is not driven by a lack of capital alone. It is driven by cash flow volatility, fixed price contracts and risks being pushed down the supply chain. This framework does not address those realities.

I had a conversation with a local builder this week. Let us call him Ed. Ed is someone with 35 years experience in the industry. He turns over $2.6 million a year and employs eight staff. He has apprentices and long-term employees. He has never had a single warranty claim against him because he builds with integrity and quality. However, he has now been forced, ahead of this legislation, because of his warranty insurance, to take out an overdraft. In this case the unclear thresholds and limited safeguards mean that there is real risk that these powers target not just bad actors but good, compliant builders as well, just like Ed – builders who are already operating under immense pressure.

Let us be clear about the context. Construction costs have surged more than 40 per cent since 2020, and building materials remain around 30 per cent higher than prepandemic levels. At the same time nearly half the cost of a new home is made up of taxes, fees and charges put in place in the last decade by the Allan Labor government. In South-West Coast we are in the middle of a housing crisis. The Allan Labor government say they are going to build more than 80,000 homes a year, but they are absolutely nowhere near it. They are not meeting anywhere near their targets. Approvals are actually falling, projects are stalling and more than 120,000 approved homes are sitting unbuilt. This is the reality behind the statistics: rising homelessness, a rental market that is tight and unaffordable and a generation of young people losing hope that they will ever be able to build a home of their own. And yet at this critical moment the Allan Labor government is laying on more regulation, more compliance costs and more uncertainty.

Industry groups warn this could increase construction costs by another 30 per cent. They are already up 40 per cent from prepandemic times. That is not just a marginal impact, that is a direct hit to housing affordability and supply, and it is the small and medium builders like Ed who will feel it most. These are the businesses that employ local workers, train apprentices and deliver the bulk of housing across Victoria, but under this bill they face increased reporting requirements, stricter financial thresholds,

greater exposure to penalties and expanded personal liability. Many will simply decide it is not worth the risk. Ed told me that when he started 35 years ago there were 16 builders in his town. Now there is only one. When builders leave the industry, projects do not get built. Housing supply falls, prices rise and every day Victorians pay the price. It risks restricting otherwise viable builders, reducing capacity and further constraining supply.

Then there is the question of readiness. The government says that this new commission will be able to handle an increased workload, more enforcement, more disputes and more oversight, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Even now the system is struggling. Complaints are not being dealt with in a timely way and stakeholders report delays, confusion and inconsistencies, and yet we are being asked to believe that this same system, rebranded and expanded and new and shiny, will suddenly perform better under significantly more pressure. That is a leap of faith we should not be asked to take.

There are also serious concerns about how this framework will operate in practice. What constitutes a major defect versus a minor one? That is not clear in this bill. How will enforcement powers be applied proportionately? What protections exist for builders facing suspension or disciplinary actions before matters are resolved? Too many of these questions are left to future regulations, guidelines or policy decisions. That creates so much uncertainty, and uncertainty is the enemy of investment, of confidence and of delivery of the homes we so desperately need during the housing crisis that we have here in Victoria.

Stronger consumer protection is important, better oversight of building standards is necessary and restoring confidence in the system is absolutely critical, but this bill in its current form does not strike the right balance. It risks overreach instead of reform, it risks burden instead of clarity and it risks undermining the very industry we rely on to deliver the homes Victorians desperately need. This government has set itself a target, but it keeps changing the goalposts, and no matter how you look at it, the failure of this government to reach its targets and build enough homes to meet demand is an abject failure of the Allan Labor government here in Victoria.

That is why the coalition have moved a reasoned amendment – not to block reform but to ensure it is done properly and to allow time for genuine consultation with industry. That is why I support the reasoned amendment put forward by the Shadow Minister for Housing and Building, to actually get this done properly and to allow the time for genuine consultation with the industry, because they know how to do it right. They are not trying to build shoddy houses. There are always bad actors, but the majority of people want to get this right so we can build the houses that are needed. We need to allow time for that genuine consultation to ensure the impacts are really understood and do not have unintended consequences and to get this right. Once again we are seeing a tired and arrogant Allan Labor government asking for trust without doing the work – no proper consultation, no clear implementation plan and no confidence that the system is even ready. We deserve a building system that is a fair and effective system that is fit for purpose and that will actually get the homes built that so many young people, so many who are homeless, so many who are waiting on public housing lists and so many who are fleeing family violence need to just have the basic right of a roof over their head.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:38): I am delighted to speak in support of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, a bill that delivers for working Victorians. On this side of the house we understand something very simple: for most people, building or buying a home is the single biggest investment they will ever make in their lives. It is not just a financial transaction, it is the foundation of security, stability and aspiration. It is where families are raised, where memories are made and where futures are built, and when that dream is shattered by dodgy building work and when families are left to fight alone, the consequences are not just financial; they are deeply personal. We are talking about debilitating debt, stress and heartbreak. That is why this bill matters. This bill is about protecting Victorian families. It recognises that when something goes wrong in the building system, the burden should not fall on the shoulders of ordinary homebuyers. No family should be forced to spend tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars fixing defective work. No-one should have to navigate a complex system alone while trying to hold a builder to account.

Victorians deserve better. They deserve confidence – confidence that when they build or buy a home they will get what they pay for. That is exactly what this bill delivers. It strengthens oversight, it modernises enforcement and, most importantly, it puts consumers, regular Victorians, at the centre of the building system, where they belong.

We know that the vast majority of builders and tradies take enormous pride in their work. They build homes they would be proud to live in and show to their families. They contribute to communities, and they do the right thing. But we also know that there are a small cohort of bad actors – dodgy builders who cut corners, exploit loopholes and leave ruin in their wake. Over time these practices have eroded trust in the building industry. They have hurt consumers, and they have unfairly undermined the many hardworking professionals that are actually doing the right thing. This bill takes decisive action to restore that trust. It finalises the establishment of a new integrated building watchdog, the Building and Plumbing Commission, and equips it with the powers it needs to root out those bad actors and lift standards across the industry.

At the core of this bill is a reform that represents a fundamental shift in how we approach building regulation in Victoria, and for the first time we are introducing a clear legislated building system objective, one that places consumers at the heart of the system. This objective makes it explicit: the purpose of the building system is to promote and protect the health and safety of building occupants and the public. This is not just a change in wording; it is a complete reorientation of the system. Every decision, every action, every regulatory function must now be viewed through one lens: does it protect Victorians?

Of course a strong objective must be backed by strong enforcement. That is why this bill introduces a robust modern compliance framework that ensures the regulator has the tools it needs to act early, proportionately and decisively; it strengthens powers to enter and investigate sites; it enables regulators to compel information; it protects authorised officers from obstruction and abuse; it introduces early intervention measures, such as improvement notices to stop problems before they escalate; and for the most serious breaches it delivers consequences that match the severity of the offence.

One of the key reforms in this bill is the introduction of a civil penalty regime. For too long penalties in the building sector have been too low, treated by some as simply the cost of doing business. That ends with this bill. Courts will now have the power to impose significant financial penalties of up to $600,000 for individuals and to strip companies of profits gained through cutting corners and putting lives at risk. This is about removing any financial incentive for bad behaviour. No builder should ever profit from doing the wrong thing.

Perhaps one of the most important reforms in this bill is the action it takes against phoenixing. We have all seen it: a builder walks away from defective work, liquidates their company and re-emerges under a new name, leaving consumers with the damage, the debt and the stress. This is unacceptable, and under this bill it will be much harder to get away with this. We are introducing new director liability provisions, ensuring that those behind companies can be held personally accountable when they fail to comply with orders; we are giving the regulator the power to issue declared director notices, making directors jointly and severally liable; and we are strengthening the ability of courts to disqualify individuals and companies from operating in the industry. This sends a clear message: you cannot hide behind corporate structures to avoid responsibility.

This bill, though, is not just about penalties, it is about fairness. It introduces a range of ancillary orders, including compensation orders, compliance orders and adverse publicity orders, ensuring that consumers are informed and protected. It establishes a consistent disciplinary framework across the industry, one that is efficient, transparent and fair, and it ensures that the regulator can act quickly when there is a serious risk to consumers. Importantly, it also supports those builders who do the right thing, because when we crack down on dodgy operators, we are backing in the vast majority of tradies who take pride in their work and play by the rules.

This bill also completes the transformation of the building regulator in Victoria. It formally establishes a streamlined, integrated Building and Plumbing Commission, a one-stop shop for consumers. It introduces stronger governance arrangements, enhanced transparency and strict conflict-of-interest rules. It ensures that those leading the regulator are independent, accountable and focused on the public interest, not on industry influence, because regular consumers deserve a regulator that backs them.

This bill builds on the significant reforms already delivered by this government. Through our buyer protection reforms, we have introduced world-leading measures like the first-resort domestic building warranty and the developer bond scheme, ensuring that consumers are no longer left to fend for themselves when defects arise. We have created financial safety nets that protect families from devastating costs, and we have given the regulator real power, including the ability to stop the sale of buildings with serious defects. Together, these reforms are transforming the building system in Victoria, making it fairer, stronger and more accountable.

Yet, despite the clear need for these reforms, those opposite have once again failed to stand up for working Victorians. Again and again they have talked about the need to address dodgy builders. Again and again they have acknowledged the harm being done to consumers. And again and again, when given the opportunity to act, they have blocked, delayed or opposed reform. They promised action when they were in government and failed to deliver. They call for reform in opposition and refuse to support it when it matters. They cannot have it both ways. The truth is simple: when it comes to choosing between working Victorians and industry pressure, those opposite choose the latter.

On this side of the house we are getting on with the job. We are building more homes and we are making sure they are built well. Through the Big Housing Build and our broader housing agenda, thousands of homes are being delivered across Victoria, giving more people the opportunity to secure a place to call home. We are reforming planning, we are boosting supply and we are driving down costs. But supply alone is not enough. Quality matters. Confidence matters. And that is why this bill is so important. This bill is about fairness and it is about accountability, but above all, it is about protecting working Victorians. It ensures that when people invest their life savings into a home, they can do so with confidence. It ensures that those who do the wrong thing are held accountable, and it ensures that the building system works for the people it is meant to serve. For these reasons, I commend the bill to the house.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (15:47): Here we go again. When, oh when, will the government address the fundamental conflict between a surveyor that is doing the work that the public demand in ensuring buildings are built to standards and marrying that against the interests of the developer? There is a structural flaw – a fundamental conflict of interest – when you have a developer paying a private surveyor to mark their homework. It is effectively marking your own homework. Until the government muscles up and addresses this fundamental flaw in the system, there simply will be no material improvement to the built outcomes in this state.

This is not the first time we have had this discussion in this place; we have had this discussion a bunch of times. It is simply not good enough to have a crack at better regulating a fundamentally flawed relationship rather than actually changing the relationship – getting rid of a relationship whereby a developer, who has got a bunch of power and a bunch of money, goes to a surveyor, who has got a bunch of power and not a great deal of money, and says, 'Here's your money; give me a tick on my project.' The reality is you have got this enormous pipeline – development approvals, building codes, standards, labour regulation. All of this stuff comes together – all of these rules and all of this compliance activity comes down to one critical decision point, and it is the decision about whether the building surveyor signs off that the building is built as per the permit or the building is built to code. That is the critical point in the entire process.

Once you pop out the other side of it, what you end up with is a bunch of disenfranchised new home owners – a bunch of people who have a radically different power relationship with the surveyor and a radically different power relationship with the developer than those two entities have with one another.

Until the government muscles up and addresses that fundamentally flawed relationship, there will be no steps forward. That is why I support the reasoned amendment on this bill, because that is the relationship that needs to be targeted. That is the relationship we need to get right if we are going to see any improvement. I am going to talk about a case study in relation to that in a moment, but I just want to make absolutely clear, for the benefit of the chamber, that this is a situation that cannot be cured for as long as developers are paying surveyors to mark their homework.

For as long as that surveyor is financially beholden to the developer, you will never, ever, ever – and you cannot ever – get genuinely independent opinions from those surveyors. It is structurally impossible. I have said it before and I will say it again: fix that relationship and a whole bunch of things will improve in the built outcomes in Victoria. Leave it as it is, and even if you regulate it a little bit better it is just not going to work. The flaw is fundamental; the relationship is broken. Private surveyors paid for by developers ought not to be performing a public function. This, at the end of the day, is a public function. If you have got any doubt about that, have a look at the amount of money the government has had to tip into cladding, which we have spoken a bit about this week. Have a look at the amount of money the government had to tip into builders falling over. At the end of the day, the final gate and the final hurdle for a developer to clear as to whether they have actually done what they say they will do and done what they have been obligated to do comes down to a building surveyor who is paid by that developer. That is a fundamental flaw, and it simply must be addressed. I wish the government had just gone that bit further in this bill.

The reality is we are here because the system is not working as it should. This bill does not cure it. It cures some things, but it is not going to cure the system as a whole. Plenty of people – my constituents – have engaged builders in good faith and have found themselves dealing with defects. I would hazard a guess that there is not a single metropolitan member in this place who has not had a constituent come to them and say, 'Our car park leaks in our brand new apartment building. We don't know what to do.' In some circumstances there is very little they can do, because the developer, perhaps because the project is pretty ordinary, has retained perhaps 51 per cent of the apartments in the project, and all of a sudden they can do nothing on the owners corporation committee because they get outvoted; they have got no power. When you are an owner with just one unit in, say, a 50-unit development, you are left powerless. You are entirely beholden to the work of a building surveyor who is in the pocket – structurally in the pocket – of the developer. The model is broken, make no mistake.

The Victorian Building Authority was a flawed organisation – appalling failures of leadership, an absolutely lax approach to enforcement, reactive not proactive. But I say that the cultural failures in that organisation – the complete lack of energy in the organisation to take builders on when things had gone wrong, the fact that it took so long to get them to move on anything – were failures of leadership; they were not failures of the organisation per se. And for anyone resting on their laurels thinking a little bit of a rejig of the responsibilities of the VBA, a spunky new title – well, not that spunky, frankly; the VBA is a better set of words, perhaps, than the Building and Plumbing Commission – and getting a new set of stationery is going to make any difference, it is absolutely not. It is not unless two fundamental things change: the quality of the leadership at the regulator, which has been left sadly and badly lacking by the government's own admission – I do not think that is in dispute – but also this fundamentally flawed relationship that sits at the heart of so many failures in built outcomes in my constituency and elsewhere across the state.

Home owners being left to navigate this complex system need to be supported by a regulator that is doing the job, a regulator who does not wait for things to escalate, a regulator who identifies problems early and a regulator that is empowered to crack down on those surveyors who are simply taking the money and running and not doing the job that they are statutorily bound to do. They should be a regulator that is compliance driven rather than complaint driven. They should be focused on outcomes, not process. What we have had with the VBA is a regulator that has failed on just about every one of those measures. There are still bad actors in the system; there are plenty of good builders too. But the fact that the burden remains with the consumers, the fact that we have pushed the burden onto the

weakest participant in the system and the power imbalance is acute, is just no good. It is no good at all.

I want to talk a little bit about 3 New Street in Ringwood, where Ashini and Michele, alongside many other residents in 3 New Street, are currently fighting the builder of their apartments. An occupancy permit was issued prematurely, but there were major defects in the build, and rectification has fallen on the new occupants because the builder was phoenixed and then a building surveyor signed off on shoddy, shoddy, shoddy work.

The work we did over a long period of time to get engagement from VBA was about the most frustrating work I have had to undertake as a member in this place. They were just incredibly slow to deal with these matters and incredibly disinterested in actually helping people who are up against it. To be very clear, for many of these apartment owners, this is their only asset. To be trapped at that point in a building where you cannot sell the thing because people know the building has got problems and you cannot get it fixed because the system is stacked against you – the level of stress, the level of trauma that attaches to that outcome is absolutely extreme, and this bill just simply does not go far enough to make sure that people in those circumstances are not left carrying the can for a regulatory system that has failed, a regulator that has failed, a builder that has failed and a building surveyor that has failed, as is the case in particular with 3 New Street. The owners corporation being used as a political plaything of the developer and being used to bully other owners is just simply not good enough. We had those constituents sit in on the owners corporation review led by the former minister Marsha Thomson, and I hope that we have more significant reforms coming down the pipe to make sure that owners corporations are behaving as they should and to make sure that developers cannot use their retention of lots in an apartment development to bully buyers who through no fault of their own have ended up in a building that has substantial defects. They are the flaws in the system.

I reckon I was just warming up too, and here we are with 45 seconds to go. Let me finish here: reform is necessary, and the bill attempts to do a chunk of it and succeeds in some respects. But there is a fundamentally flawed relationship between developer and building surveyor, which is effectively the relationship between the developer and the public good of making sure that buildings are built in accordance with their permits and in accordance with the laws laid out for them. That relationship is broken. This bill does nothing to fix it. This bill ought to do something to fix it, and the government will never, ever get quality outcomes unless they fix that fundamentally flawed relationship.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:57): Those opposite have shown us who they truly represent in this place, and it is not Victorians. They have moved the reasoned amendment by the Master Builders – I mean, by the member for Caulfield, who seems to be standing up in this place not for the people of his community but for industry bodies. That is not what we are here to do. We are meant to be here representing the people of our community. We hear from those on both sides about the people in their communities that have suffered from dodgy builders, and we have seen those opposite with their arms around them on the news at night-time if it is going to score some political points. But when the time comes to do their job in this place and represent them and put protections in place for those people, where are they? They are absent. They are not here representing the people that put them here, they are here representing industry. That is wrong, and that is what makes them so different from us.

This bill puts at its heart Victorians – house buyers, consumers – explicitly, making the primary objective of this regulation to support Victorians, to protect consumers and to keep them from the harm and the cost of a defective home. Those opposite do not seem to be interested. They are so disinterested they are repeating the lines from the previous consumer protection bills that we put in place that they voted against. They have mixed them all up in their heads. They say, 'Consumer protection: bad. We're going against it.' It is the typical playbook from those opposite, and it is definitely not one that we will follow.

We are pushing ahead with this. It is not the first round of consumer protection legislation for the building industry we have put in place and I dare say it will not be the last, because we are cleaning

up the joint. We are making sure that consumers come first and, when they make the biggest investment of their life, they are protected.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Cost of living

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Frankston proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

> That this house notes that Victorian families are facing growing pressure in their daily lives as the cost of living and global events put household budgets under strain and only the Allan Labor government is responding with new and practical solutions that deliver real cost-of-living relief and make life easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:01): This is a critically important MPI, but families in Victoria do not experience the cost of living as a political talking point in this place. We have heard how they are experiencing cost-of-living pressures as a trolley that costs more than it used to, a power bill that arrives too soon to be able to be paid, a school term that seems to come with its own stack of invoices, a tank of petrol that somehow costs more every single week and a household budget that used to bend but that now simply snaps. When that pressure builds, Victorian families are entitled to expect something very, very basic and simple from this Parliament, and that is pragmatism: a sensible, unified and practical approach based on real-world solutions to solving Victorians' problems – not slogans, not stunts, not dogma and not a media conference that pretends to be a policy platform.

Victorians are entitled to expect a government that understand that their job is not just to talk about pressure but to actually to solve these problems. That will be the central difference in this debate, because the Allan Labor government have responded to cost-of-living pressure with new and practical solutions that make life easier, safer and more affordable. The opposition, by contrast, has responded in the only way it seems to know how, and that is by consistently coming up with internal panic, dysfunction and, as we have seen this week, an iconic level of chaos. But with that comes absolutely zero policy. There is zero policy on cost of living from those opposite. I guess that is the thing about the modern Liberal Party. As we will see throughout this discussion, no-one can screw up something so simple like they do. How we could ever trust them to act in the best interests of Victorians is something that no-one is willing to do.

They are actually at war with themselves and are not interested in Victorians. Take this week – they held what practically amounted to job interviews for candidates. In a cost-of-living crisis they expect their candidates to pay $5000 to become candidates. That pleasure of paying $5000 is part of their vetting process, and what we saw within 24 hours was that the Liberal Party had turfed someone because no-one had even google-checked if this person had given a reference to a convicted child sex offender. You cannot make this up. If you cannot manage something that simple, you certainly cannot manage Victoria.

Today it is really important that this house not only debates the cost of living and how we push relief in that area but also who can do that most effectively. We are debating whether Victorians should trust the pragmatism, the action, the competency and the stability of this government, who are helping Victorians with the cost of living and balancing their weekly budget, or an opposition who cannot even balance their own frontbench. It is the difference between commentating and actually governing, and fuel prices are a great way to get started on this MPI, demonstrating how this government takes action on behalf of Victorians. Let us be honest, we know that taking action on the fuel price itself is a very hard thing when you are talking about international forces. But fuel prices are putting real pressure on families in Victoria. People feel it every time they pull up to the servo, and that is why the government is acting to take pressure off in a practical way.

We are making public transport free for one month. That means free trains, trams, buses, Metro and V/Line every day until the end of April for everyone. This is not just rhetoric, this is real relief. It means a worker can get to work without topping up their Myki. It means a family can get the kids to where they need to go without another transport cost. It means a student can get to class without their back pocket being hit. But it also means something else very important. It gives families that little bit of breathing room, a little bit of flexibility, a little bit less pressure in the weekly budget, and that matters because cost-of-living relief works best when it is practical enough that people can actually feel it.

But this Labor government also understands that short-term help matters most when it is backed by long-term reform, and that is why this government is also delivering one of the biggest public transport relief measures for Victorian families in years, and that is free public transport for every child. That means free public transport for Victorians under 18 every day, permanently. That will save families up to $755 a year per child. For the average family with three children, that is $2265 a year back in their pocket. It is not symbolic. Again, it is not rhetorical. That is money that stays in the household budget, and that matters because cost of living is not just one bill. It is the accumulation of a ton of things: the train fare, the uniforms, the groceries, the school excursions, the sport registration, the doctor's appointment, the unexpected costs and the thousands of smaller costs that shape whether a family budget stretches for the week or not. This government understands that if you want to help families, you do not just do it with one flashy announcement. You have got to take the pressure off in practical, repeated, tangible ways, and that is what this government is doing.

The government is also focused on helping families save something just as valuable as money, and that is time. That is why we are making working from home a right your boss cannot simply take away, improving public transport and roads to get people home sooner and delivering more homes where young people can actually afford to live near trains, near jobs and near services, because if you are spending less time commuting, less time stuck in traffic, that is cost-of-living relief too. It is relief in the real world, it is relief in real time, and it is the kind of thing only a serious government and a serious party understand. I think, by contrast, we have heard zero cost-of living-policies from the opposition. They appear to think that cost of living is something you shout about in front of the cameras but you do not actually have to open a policy document and prove you put some thought into it.

We also understand on this side of the house a deeper truth, and that is that for many families the biggest cost-of-living relief is not just a rebate or a voucher from the government; it is public health care and public education that they can rely on. That is why we are making health care easier and cheaper for busy families to access, and that includes free urgent care clinics with bulk-billing doctors, the free virtual emergency department and Chemist Care Now, so Victorians can get the scripts they need for the ailments they have without needing to go to a GP – for things like the pill, UTIs et cetera. And that matters. Every family I know, including my own, knows the pressure of trying to juggle a sick kid, working, clinic hours, waiting rooms and the costs adding up right in front of them.

Education support is another area where we have introduced a lot of cost-of-living relief, because every parent knows the start of school is not just exciting for their children, it can be expensive – uniforms, books, devices, camps, sports, musical equipment, activities, everything arriving at once. The question I think for government and anyone in this house is simple: do you just acknowledge that all these costs, including these school costs, are hard, or do you actually help? This government has chosen to take proactive action to help: permanent free public transport for every child, support that saves families on uniforms and devices, free dental check-ups through the Smile Squad and the free glasses program, as well as prep bags, kits and baby bundles. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund has increased payments to $400 for eligible families to make sure no-one misses out as well. We know that when families are under pressure it is often children's opportunities, unfortunately, that get squeezed first – the camp that gets missed, the sport that gets deferred, the excursion that becomes a 'maybe next year'. That is why this support matters, because cost-of-living policy is not just about the bills; it is really about belonging, participation and opportunity as well.

Speaking of opportunity, we cannot not mention our younger Victorians. Free kinder – we have all heard about it – for three- and four-year-olds is saving families up to $2600 per child every year. This is not just good education policy, this is not just good cost-of-living policy; this is amazing, because it means families are not forced to choose between what is best for their child and what they can afford. It means we are keeping in line with some of the education revolutions that are happening internationally in places like Indonesia. We have also got free access to maternal and child health services, baby bundles, prep bags and kinder kits. Again, it is not performative, not abstract, not rhetorical – just practical support where families actually feel pressure.

When people are doing it tough, governments also have to respond with some of the most basic supports, and that is why this budget includes $18 million for increased food relief, because there are families right now – and I think everyone in this house knows at least one of them – who do not need a lecture, they just need help. Serious governments do not pretend everyone is travelling the same path. They understand that for some Victorians pressure is not just frustrating, it is acute. It is good to see that this government has taken action, and it has been recognised by the Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards, who has said the government's efforts to tackle cost-of-living pressures will make a difference. I think that is the headline, that is the test: will it make a difference? Not 'Will it get a headline', not 'Will it get a rant on the radio', not 'Will it make a dramatic social media clip that trends', but 'Will it make a difference to our community?' I think our government is stepping up to that test with capped regional fares, free car rego for apprentices, free L-plate and P-plate licences and online testing, a free 60-minute driving lesson for younger Victorian learner drivers, discounted licence renewals for safe drivers, short-term vehicle registration and rego discounts for eligible concession card holders as well.

But it is not just about those cost-of-living measures. Cost of living is also inseparable from housing. We have slashed stamp duty from off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses. We have introduced the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, contributing up to 25 per cent of the purchase price through shared equity. We have introduced first home buyer stamp duty exemptions, the $10,000 first home buyer grant and a cap of one residential rent rise per 12 months, and we are changing the rules so that building and pest inspections are required to be carried out by the vendor, not the buyer, and that can save people up to $4200 a year.

Earlier I did say that the Liberals have zero policy. I did forget that they did bring out a housing policy – well, an anti-housing policy – recently to cut 300,000 houses, to lock young people out of the places that they actually want to live, to tell them they can live further out, wait longer and pay more. It was not a plan to actually build communities, it was to preserve their own kind of postcode privilege, you could say.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the midday power saver and also the fair fuel plan, requiring fuel companies to publicly report their price changes the day before and then lock them in for 24 hours. Again, these measures add up to hundreds of dollars per year. The contrast – well, we have seen the movie before. We have seen the Liberal movie before. When they were last in power, electricity prices rose 34 per cent, between 2010 and 2014; council rates rose sharply; they slashed $555 million from state schools, gutting programs that actually helped families; and they deleted free fruit Friday in fact. That is the Liberal pattern – cuts to health, cuts to education. They have got to tell us how they are going to fill their $11.5 billion black hole in their budget position, because everyone in Victoria knows that when Liberals say 'discipline', Victorian families usually end up hearing 'cuts'. We have seen it many times before.

I think this MPI recognises two very important things, and those are that Victorian families are under real pressure – because they are – and, second, that in moments like these governments are judged not by how loudly they speak about these problems but by the action they actually take. The Labor government has acted. It has acted to reduce pressure in ways that are real, accessible and immediate. I could go on for the next 2 hours about what we have done in that space. But what we have done and what we have demonstrated in this most difficult of times I think is we are a government that can listen

and a government that is pragmatic, because when times are hard, Victorians are not asking for theatre; they are asking the government to work even harder to make life easier, like we are.

The choice in this debate is extremely clear. One side is doing the work of government, and the other side is doing the work of controlling its internal damage. One side is delivering relief; the other side is delivering daily chaotic rants in the paper. If Victorians want to know who is on their side when times are tough, the answer is very, very clear. It is the Allan Labor government that is helping Victorian families get through the week. Meanwhile the Victorian Liberals still appear to be trying to get through each other, and we have seen that time and time again over the last couple of weeks.

I challenge speakers on the opposite side of the house, with respect: tell us your plans to tackle cost of living. Tell us what you would do. Do not just complain that not enough is being done. Tell us what you would do in no uncertain terms. You are meant to be an alternative government. You are posing yourselves as an alternative government. Tell Victorians what you would like to do. Do not just talk about us not doing enough. Tell us how you are filling that $11.5 billion black hole without cutting teachers, without cutting nurses, without cutting essential services, because I will be here listening. It is not good enough to look concerned and sympathetic and hope no-one asks the question. You need to come up with solutions as well. This MPI is critical, and I cannot wait to hear what others in this house have to say.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Evelyn, I will just remind members that using the word 'you' is a reflection on the Chair.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (16:16): Cost-of-living pressures are being felt by each and every Victorian, and life is getting harder. The issue top of mind for people in my community right now, whether in Mooroolbark, in Lilydale, in Montrose, through the Yarra Valley, in fact right across Victoria, is the cost and the availability of fuel. The fuel crisis is not just about the cost at the pump; it is about the choice families are forced to make to fill up the car or put food on the table, to drive the kids to their sports or dancing, to drive to visit the grandparents or to drive to Ringwood for services that we cannot access in Lilydale or the Yarra Valley. The fuel crisis will result in higher prices for everything – any product on the shelf at the supermarket, any manufactured good that people need in their homes or in their small businesses, at the retail shops, for tradies or on the farm. Our farmers were already doing it tough after drought, after Labor's harsh emergency services and volunteers tax, which hit farmers the hardest, and now there is the stress of not only the cost of fuel to produce food but the availability of fuel to keep the farms running.

It was the Victorian Liberals and Nationals that took the campaign to the federal Labor government to cut the fuel excise, because Premier Allan did not – a tax that put 50 cents of every litre of fuel into the coffers of the Labor government up in Canberra. Our campaign, our push on behalf of Victorian people who are doing it tough to get that cost-of-living relief has finally resulted in the government reducing the fuel excise. But you have got to reflect: what took them so long? Now we need to ensure the prices do come down at fuel retailers, and we will hold the Labor government to account on that.

But let us not forget the cost of fuel had been a cost-of-living concern for people well before the conflict in Iran. The cost of living generally under Labor has been one of the most significant concerns for people in my community and right across Victoria for a long time now. While the Labor government members today will talk big about their free travel on public transport for April to help people that cannot afford to fill up fuel in their cars, tell that to people in my community, where there is no train beyond Lilydale and there are limited buses across the community and limited bus routes. I can tell you where I live in Wandin there is absolutely no way that it is feasible to go to the supermarket, to do the shopping in Lilydale or in Seville, and then get that back home on public transport. It is at least 20 to 25 minutes to walk to a bus stop, and that would be on the road, because there are no footpaths, and that is the case for most families in my community.

It is more policy on the run that suits inner-city people in Labor's fight against the Greens in seats like Footscray and Northcote, but it does very little for people in the outer suburbs or regional communities like the Evelyn and Monbulk electorates. Kids cannot even get to school at the moment. We are almost at the end of term one, and there are still not enough public school buses to transport children, particularly secondary schoolchildren, from my community to schools in Lilydale and Mooroolbark. I know that this is an issue for many school students across Victoria. Kids are left stranded on the roadside unable to get to school because the buses are overcrowded and dangerously crammed, and so their parents, who have already driven to work, have to leave work temporarily, spend more on fuel, drive to the bus stop, pick up their stranded and stressed kids to drive them to school, and they get to school late. And at the end of the school day, it is not any better. Again, it is policy on the run from this Labor government. They will claim making public transport free for children under 18 is a cost-of-living measure to help young people and families, but that policy is no solution if there are not enough buses for the schoolchildren to get to and from school.

The cost of fuel is up, the cost of groceries is up, the cost of electricity under this Labor government is up and it is hard to get a bus because there are just not enough buses and there are just not enough bus routes – a complete failure of leadership by this Labor government that has been in power for 12 long years. They are asking Victorians this November for 16 years in office. It is well and truly time for a change to a Liberal government to give Victoria the fresh start that it needs, because under Labor life is harder. Victorians are faced with tough choices. They are having to tighten their belts each and every day for everyday basics. But has the government tightened its belt? No. All they have done is spend more and waste more and tax Victorians more at the worst possible time. This Andrews–Allan Labor regime have proven one thing: they are economic vandals. They have sent Victoria broke, and Victorians are paying the price. State debt will skyrocket to a record $194 billion in just three years time. Labor seems to have no care that this whopping debt will be left as a burden for our children and our grandchildren to pay.

What happens when you have debt? There is an interest bill that has to be repaid on that debt. Under Labor, repayments on this debt have skyrocketed to $24 million a day; a jaw-dropping $1 million each and every hour. If Labor wants today to talk about cost-of-living relief, then think what that $1 million each and every hour wasted on interest repayments on Labor's debt could have instead gone to: meaningful cost-of-living relief measures for everyday Victorians, like perhaps funding a few more buses for students trying to get to school in Mooroolbark and Lilydale. That is $24 million a day that cannot be spent on improving healthcare and ambulance services, fixing dangerous roads or funding more nurses or teachers or police. It is $1 million per hour to pay down interest on government debt that cannot be spent providing cost-of-living relief to Victorian households and small businesses when they need it most. There have been massive cost blowouts on Big Build infrastructure projects – projects that have been poorly planned and poorly managed by Premier Allan as the former transport infrastructure minister and now as the Premier responsible for nearly $50 billion, at least, in budget blowouts on these projects.

Talking about cost of living, the cost of living for organised crime in this state is fine, thanks to this Labor government, with $15 billion ending up in the pockets of criminals on Labor's rotten and corrupt Big Build infrastructure projects. Just think what cost-of-living relief that could have funded for hardworking, law-abiding Victorians. Not only could we have funded the Lilydale, Mount Evelyn and Seville community houses, which are crying out for funding certainty because this Labor government will not provide that to these community houses, but we could have opened another one to help the vulnerable people in my community. Or we could have funded the Lilydale youth mental health hub – which Labor cut funding to, forcing it to close – for the young people suffering from mental ill health in my community. Or it could have funded the duplication of the Lilydale train line to make sure that trains actually run more than 25 to 30 minutes each and every time and actually improve the frequency and punctuality right down the Lilydale train line. Or it could have funded the fixing of the dangerous and congested bottleneck of Mooroolbark and Hull roads in Mooroolbark.

It is curious that Labor wants to talk about cost-of-living pressures, because it is this tired 12-year Labor regime that is compounding people's cost of living with the highest taxes in the country. Not only does Victoria have the highest debt of any state in the nation, it also has the highest taxes in the nation. That is right: under this Allan Labor government Victorians are the highest taxed people in the country. Remember in 2014 that little promise by Daniel Andrews and this Labor government? No new taxes, they promised Victorians. They have broken this promise not once, not twice, but 66 times, and after 12 years of Labor rule Labor has increased state taxes 66 times – and they want people to give them 16 years in power. If Labor was serious about the cost of living, then why has it introduced a rent tax, a schools tax, a jobs tax, a holiday tax, an emergency services and volunteers tax?

On the schools tax, it is impacting a number of schools right across Victoria but certainly in my electorate, which will translate into higher fees for families to send their kids there. It is a tax on these kids' learning and could see some families needing to pull their kids from some of these wonderful schools. Billanook College, Edinburgh College, Mount Lilydale Mercy College and Mount Evelyn Christian School are all hit by Labor's unfair schools tax. It is a tax on learning; it is a tax on education. To these school communities, to the thousands of local kids that attend these schools, we say: the Victorian Liberals and Nationals value your education, your learning, your family choice, and we will scrap this tax.

Labor's new emergency services volunteers tax will see Victorian households paying an extra $3 billion. It will hurt every Victorian in this cost-of-living crisis. Households will pay double under this tax. The cost of rent for renters will increase under this tax. Businesses like cafes, hairdressers, gyms – all businesses – will pay double under this tax. It will increase the costs for manufacturers, which will drive up the cost of locally made products. And our farmers will be the hardest hit, with a 150 per cent increase in the tax next year. Along with high fuel prices, Labor's emergency services and volunteers tax will force up the price of fresh produce – of meat, veggies and fruit – at the shops. And the tax revenue raised is not even guaranteed to provide more funding to the CFA and SES volunteers, which is wrong and unfair. There is no carve-out, no guarantee that any of that money will get to the Lilydale SES or the Maroondah and Yarra Valley group CFA fire brigades in my community or these emergency services volunteers right across Victoria. Lest there be any doubt, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals will scrap this tax.

What is troubling still is that the Andrews and Allan Labor government have not ruled out further taxes. Again, the Allan Labor government has not ruled out any more new taxes. How many more taxes and how much more pain will Labor inflict on Victorians to subsidise their budget blowouts and their record debt? Victorians are paying more than ever before, and they are getting less for it. For example, we pay more in car rego, yet the roads around our state are in a woeful condition. Dangerous intersections: just look at the Maroondah Highway and Killara Road, Coldstream, intersection or Warburton Highway up in Seville East – fatalities, and yet this Labor government still leaves those roads and intersections dangerous. Potholed roads cannot be fixed because of Labor's financial mismanagement. And when local farmers and local families blow a tyre in the massive potholes on Victorian roads that split their tyres, that crack their rims, guess what, they have to pay to get that fixed. They have to pay to get a new tyre or a new rim, and that adds to their cost of living, and it all is as a result of the terrible roads under the financial mismanagement of this Labor government, because they have failed to maintain and fix the dangerous roads across our community, particularly our outer suburban and regional communities.

Of course business conditions are challenging in this state. Following a decade of waste and reckless spending under Labor, Victoria has the most debt, the highest taxes and the poorest business conditions of any state in the nation. That adds to the cost of living and the cost to serve for businesses. We are seeing so many businesses choosing to not invest in Victoria and choosing to move interstate. Growth in the Victorian economy has almost come to a complete standstill – it is only at 1.1 per cent. It is a shame that under this Labor government that is the case.

When we talk about cost of living, it is not just for families, it is also for our businesses, our small businesses particularly, because it is the cost of electricity and of fuel – these costs as they rise and rise mean the choices are hard for these small businesses. That is less shifts for young retail workers, let alone retail workers having to suffer increased crime rates and theft in retail stores under this Labor government. The cost to serve for business is causing many of these small businesses in my community and across Victoria to close, because they can no longer afford the high taxes under Labor or the regulation or the other impacts of costs. This Labor government tries to talk a big game when it comes to cost-of-living relief for Victorians, but they are doing everything to make the cost of living worse for Victorians with their highest taxes.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:31): Thank God for the Victorian Liberal Party. Someone writes a letter in crayon, and then all of a sudden a discount on fuel excise is their idea. It is like listening to the Victorian Greens taking credit for things that they had absolutely nothing to do with. It is a pleasure to contribute in favour of this MPI talking about cost-of-living relief that this government is providing to Victorians. We know that cost-of-living pressures are extending throughout the entire economy. Five thousand dollars to vet someone – $5000 to vet a political candidate. Who would have thought that that is right, particularly when you do not do it properly – sheer incompetence. Think about this: you line someone up, you do not miss, but you do not vet the person that you line her up with properly.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, whilst MPIs are relatively wideranging, this is nothing remotely like what is on the agenda for this MPI.

The SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, come back to the MPI.

Dylan WIGHT: I just thought it was worth mentioning. This government is on Victoria's side. Whilst those opposite spend all weekend and all week in this place talking about themselves, we will be in here doing what is right for Victorians to provide cost-of-living relief. It is pertinent to be speaking on this MPI on the very first day of free public transport here in Victoria. Whilst those opposite may pretend that the Victorian government can have some influence on a foreign leader who has decided to start a conflict somewhere else in the world, we will get on with providing relief for every Victorian and for Victorian families. We will get on with doing what we can to provide cost-of-living relief for all Victorians. We know that it is tough out there, particularly with fuel prices at the moment. The state government clearly has very few levers to pull when it comes to things like fuel security, fuel prices, fuel imports and foreign conflicts – very few levers to pull. Providing free public transport is one of them, and we pulled it. It is one lever that we have to pull and we pulled it, as we should have.

What that will mean is that people that would typically be in their car around metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria that have access to public transport each day can jump on that public transport, whether that be train or bus, free of charge. They can leave their car at home. They can avoid the anxiety of going to the petrol station and paying $150 to fill up a tank, and they can jump on public transport free for all of April. We obviously hope that this conflict and these pressures do not last very long, but we have pulled that very important lever to provide public transport free of charge for the month of April. But of course, if you are a public transport commuter day in and day out anyway, you are still going to get that free public transport, saving you hundreds of dollars for the month of April, which you can put back into your family, into putting food on the table and into paying the bills, which is absolutely fantastic.

Last year the Victorian government made the single biggest investment ever on cost-of-living relief. $2.3 billion worth of cost-of-living relief for Victorian families, for Victorian workers, for every Victorian, was included in last year's budget, whether that be things like the school saving bonus or whether that be the Smile Squad. Free kinder was not in last year's budget, but of course there is free kinder. This government has been committed to doing everything we can to make sure that Victorians have what they need when they need it. We will pull every lever available to us to make life for Victorian families as easy as we possibly can, and the free public transport example is just one.

Compare and contrast that to those opposite. I have not heard them have a cost-of-living relief policy yet. I have not heard them roll one of those out that they are going to roll into the election. I have seen them roll out a dodgy housing statement. That is not cost-of-living relief. What they have announced is an $11.5 billion spending cut, an $11.5 billion black hole in the budget. How do you fill that? I would suggest that they are not just going to try to grow the economy to fill that, they are going to have to cut. What did they cut last time: Free Fruit Friday. Member for Greenvale and member for St Albans, think about the amount of kids in our electorates that eat breakfast at school through our amazing breakfast club program. They do so because if they did not have breakfast at school, in all likelihood they would not have breakfast. Is that going to be something that a future Liberal government cuts?

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: One hundred percent, they did it last time. There is a binary choice for Victorians at the ballot box on 28 November this year: a government that is on their side, that will provide the cost-of-living relief that they need, that will make sure that their children go to school with full stomachs so they can learn and that will provide free kinder, because we know how important those early childhood years are, or a Liberal cut squad led by somebody who idolises former Premier Jeff Kennett, who closed hospitals, who closed schools, who sacked teachers and who sacked nurses. There is a binary choice there, and I would think that a government that is on the side of Victorians is fundamentally good for Victoria.

We are talking about cost-of-living relief, and the member for Evelyn spoke about how hard it is for Victorians. I do not walk away from that, but we also have to be mindful that Victoria, in terms of inflationary pressures, has been the best of any state in the country for the last 12 months. Last year inflation was 3.3 per cent in Victoria. That is compared to 3.8 per cent everywhere else in the country. So the price of goods and services went up in Victoria less than it went up anywhere else. 3.3 per cent is not high inflation by any means; it is quite moderate. The member for Evelyn also spoke about the rate at which Victoria's economy is growing – the fastest in the country. We are in a pretty low-growth environment at the moment, but Victoria is still growing the fastest in the country, outpacing any other state for the calendar year last year.

We have had inflation under control in this state – obviously with fuel prices, that is going to look very different in the next quarter. But we have also been growing our economy through both public demand but also private demand, because Victoria, in terms of private capital investment, has the second most of any state anywhere in the country. South Australia has the most – South Australia seems to be going bunta. Indeed there is negative growth of private investment in Queensland. We are outpacing New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia. The economy here is going just fine.

The last thing that I want to touch on is energy prices. We have the lowest default offer in the country. But in an electorate like mine, in Tarneit, the Victorian Energy Upgrades and the Solar Homes program have, since their inception, issued 90,000 grants. So what that means in a place like Tarneit is you are able to, through a government grant, put solar panels on your roof. Through a federal grant you might be able to put a battery on there as well. And your power bill is significantly cheaper than it would be without government support. It is an absolutely amazing program, and in our growth suburbs in particular people have really taken advantage of that. I have just gone through a litany of examples as to how this government is helping people with the cost of living, whether that be free public transport, whether that be the Solar Homes program or whether that be free breakfast clubs. There will be a binary choice on 28 November this year between a government that is on your side or a Liberal cut squad.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:42): What an extraordinary speech we have just had from the member for Tarneit, where a speaker gets up and talks about a litany of cost-of-living measures produced by a government that is the source of most of the cost-of-living pressures in this state right now – I will not say of all the problems. But how dare this government get up and say only they

understand cost-of-living pressures when they have been the ones putting the cost-of-living pressures on Victorians every single day for the last 12 years while they have been the government of this place. The 66 new or increased taxes that this government has put on have had an impact on every single household in this state. And now they stand up there and say, 'We have got the solutions. We're going to give you a little bit back, because we've taxed you to the hilt. Now we're actually going to give you a little bit back because it's actually hurting us a bit in the polls.' That is what is hurting this government; that is the cost of living that they are feeling at the moment. They know that they are on the nose in this state, because Victorians are sick of it. Victorians are sick of being taxed to the hilt, sick of seeing the waste from this government on so many issues but particularly on the Big Build, where there is $15 billion of government money, taxpayers money, Victorians' money, that has gone into the coffers of, literally, bikies and criminals. And the government stands there and says, 'Oh, we dispute that figure. But we're cracking down on the corruption.'

Brad Battin interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Maybe it is $14.9 billion, member for Berwick, or maybe it is $29 billion, who knows, because this government is refusing to actually investigate it. They do not care. Victorians want their money back. Victorians are saying to us, 'When are we going to get the money back? We've paid it and we've seen nothing for it.' And it is not just the corruption; on the Big Build alone there has been $50 billion in cost overruns.

Tim Bull interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: No, that is not even a conservative figure, member for Gippsland East. That is from the government's own estimates, from what they said something was going to cost to what they now say it is going to cost. And that is not including the Suburban Rail Loop. Despite the fact the government said in 2021 that it would be about $34.5 billion for the first stage, then they said, a couple of years ago, that costs had increased by 20 per cent in the building sector since 2021 but not on the Suburban Rail Loop. They are still saying that it is $34.5 billion, so God knows how much that is going to be when it comes to it.

Victorians are sick of this, and regional Victorians in particular, who the Nationals are here to stand up for. We are seeing $50 billion in cost overruns. We are seeing $15 billion of money wasted going to crooks and criminals on the Big Build, yet in regional Victoria we are getting nothing. Our roads are goat tracks. Our roads in particular are just riddled with potholes because we have seen this government wasting money on the Big Build, wasting money on corruption, going to crooks and criminals and bikies and strippers on government worksites. Yet we cannot get decent roads. I just got an email literally in the last 2 minutes from another person complaining about yet another section of road that is being reduced from 100 k's to 80 k's, again because the roads are in such poor condition. We are hearing this time and time again. It is extraordinary to hear the member for Frankston and the member for Tarneit speak up –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: And here is a call coming in now about the waste that we have seen. The Minister for Veterans is getting a call about a pothole, no doubt, because I am sure even in the suburban seats we are hearing these complaints. But we hear those members opposite talk about all the wonderful things they are doing to reduce the cost of living, and I want to quote a Labor MP, the Premier of New South Wales, who said nothing is free. He said:

> There's no such thing as free public transport. At the end of the day, someone's paying for it.

That is a message that the member for Frankston, the member for Tarneit and everyone on that side should have a think about, because while they are giving with one hand, with all these free things – supposedly – they are actually taking it from Victorians with the other. We never hear the Labor government's new tax on something, but we always hear how Labor is giving you something for free. They cannot give you anything for free because they are taking it from you in the first place.

Some of the most egregious are those 66 new or increased taxes. We have committed to removing five of them. The number one I want to talk about is the emergency services tax, because that is the most egregious piece of public policy in the last few years. It is very sneaky and very clever and very tricky of the government to say, 'We're just going to take a little bit more money to support our emergency services.' Half of it is actually going on things that we already pay for. Half a billion dollars is going this year on things like Emergency Management Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria – Crown land, which taxpayers are being asked to pay for again. So it is very sneaky and very tricky. Yet this $3 billion hit on Victorians is actually another cost-of-living hit. Does the government not understand that?

Indeed not only is it on every household, but there is an extra tax coming on landlords. Who is going to pay for that? Renters. We hear this mob all the time having a fight with their Greens mates up the back there about who is better on rent. None of them ever acknowledge that of the 66 new or increased taxes, half are on property and half are on landlords. That has an impact. It actually comes through to the renter, and they have to pay for it. Yet this this government does not understand it.

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is right, member for Sandringham – the people who can least afford it. The Nationals and Liberals will remove the emergency services tax. It is a disgraceful piece of public policy. We will scrap the tax because it is having an impact on every single Victorian. We know the government has supposedly frozen it for primary producers. What do we reckon is going to happen if the Labor government wins the election this year? Do you reckon the 150 per cent increase in tax on farmers is going to go away? No, of course it is not. We know those people over there are already banking it in the ledger. They are going to make the farmers pay even more if they are re-elected. It is a stay of execution, and this is a government that cannot be trusted, because we know it needs the money. We know they are desperate to find the money, and we know that regional Victorians are going to be the ones that pay for it.

The government talk about housing. We have got less housing being built now than there was in 2014, and when there is less housing being built, that increases the costs. If you speak to anyone who is trying to get into the market, that is one thing that they are struggling with, because either they cannot find somewhere or it is way too expensive.

Whether it is the cost of housing or the cost of rentals, this government has made it harder. You hear it time and time again, and I know what they will say – well, maybe the minister at the table, the Minister for Veterans, will not say this because she just accused us of being anti-business. But if you actually talk to business, talk to the Urban Development Institute Victoria, talk to the Property Council Australia, talk to the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, talk to the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, they will all tell you about the acronyms ABM and ABV. Investors are saying it to them, and they are saying it to us: 'We will invest in Australia, but anywhere but Victoria – anywhere but Melbourne.' If the minister does not believe it, she needs to go and talk to businesses. That is having an impact because this government cannot manage money, and every single Victorian is paying the price for it.

Obviously part of the basis of this MPI is about the free public transport that the government is offering. Well, when you look around regional Victoria, you wonder how much that impacts. I reckon the member for Lowan would like to tell me how many people are catching free public transport in her electorate.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: None to the Stawell Gift. Half of them do not have trains and half of us do not have buses, and yet we are expected to be thankful for this. Then we have had the government equivocating in the last 24 hours about whether they will even give the GST windfall that they are

receiving from the increase in petrol prices back to regional Victorians and to Victorians generally. The government cannot even give us a clear answer on that.

It is embarrassing that this government is raising cost of living and all the wonderful things that it is doing for cost of living, because when it comes to cost of living, this is Dracula being in charge of the blood bank. They have actually caused the problems on cost of living, and this government will continue to make it hard for Victorians. The Nationals and Liberals will ease cost of living for everyone.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:52): I am pleased to rise to speak on this matter of public importance:

> That this house notes that Victorian families are facing growing pressure in their daily lives as the cost of living and global events put household budgets under strain and only the Allan Labor government is responding with new and practical solutions that deliver real cost-of-living relief and make life easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians.

I would like to respond in my contribution to a couple of things that were said from the other side. We had the member for Evelyn saying that we would all talk about free public transport and how that meant nothing to people in the regions, and indeed the Leader of the Nationals has just backed that in by telling us that nothing is free. I would like to draw to the attention of both of them that in fact the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation and perhaps the next member for Murray Plains has actually called for it. I would like the Leader of the Nationals to hear Brett Hosking's words that free public transport can make a real difference:

> Every commuter who leaves their car at home frees up fuel for the essential, time-critical work that keeps Victorians fed, whether that's ensuring livestock are fed and cared for, or getting crops in the ground.

So the president of the VFF is very supportive of the free transport public transport measure, and perhaps if those on the other side like to profess that they represent people in the regions and they represent farmers, they might think to listen to Brett Hoskings on that matter.

When I thought about speaking on this matter of public importance, I thought about the many policies that this government have put in place and thought about how I was going to talk about them. What came back to me at the end of the day is that this matter of public importance is not an abstract debate. It is not an argument. It is about real people and helping real people survive. I have been a single working mum, and I know what it is to face cost-of-living pressures day by day. Those on the other side want to bag all of these policies, and they continue to talk about this terrible debt. I want to say to the working mothers of Victoria out there that when they talk about reducing the debt, what they are talking about is reducing the services that help us survive – things like kinders in school. We did not have it in my day, but what a difference it would have made. I would have been able to get to my part-time job much more quickly if I could have put both of the boys at kinder and at school at the same time.

Those on the other side talk about debt, and in fact what that money has really gone to is creating a better Victoria. I would like to point out that the last time, and perhaps the only time, that a Liberal government have ever done anything was under Henry Bolte. He was the last great nation builder, and Henry Bolte understood that you have to invest in the state. Henry Bolte took the Victorian debt to over 50 per cent of gross state product – we are currently nowhere near that. It would be good if those on the other side listened and understood what Henry Bolte understood, which is that a government's role is to invest in the state, and if we need to borrow money to invest in the services that make the lives of our constituents better, then that is our obligation to do. But sadly, those on the other side do not know how to build anything like Bolte did; all they know what to do is to cut. They have made it very, very clear that in fact that is what they are going to do. Joe McCracken from the other place was

very vocal when he spoke about it back in 2025. I just want to correctly quote his words. He said it is going to be:

> … a really difficult balancing act of how much do you cut, what do you cut, what services can you live without, what services can't (you).

I say that quote because I think that is what Victorians, and particularly Victorian families and Victorian women, will have in their minds when they go to the polls. What services are they going to cut? What of those things that I really need are they going to cut? We have heard from the Leader of the Nationals about how nothing gets done in regional areas. Well, as a regional mother there have been many great cost-of-living measures that have made a real difference to our lives. I think that when they go to the polls women in Victoria will ask themselves: 'Next time I need to take my child to the urgent care clinic, will it still be there or will the Liberals have cut it?' and say 'When I am trying to decide if I can afford school uniforms I think, "That was a great practical support from the Allan Labor government, making no branding on school uniforms from the waist down."' Those on the other side talk about waste but what they are saying to me as a mother is that my time is unimportant, that to waste money on me is not important. I think Victorian women will go to the next election and think about those things.

I think one of the ones that really distressed me was when I looked through *Hansard* and the only time that the current Leader of the Opposition mentioned free TAFE was to say that it was a waste. She said free kinder and free TAFE were a waste, that we were wasting money. As someone who got a second chance at life through TAFE, it is an incredibly important part of our educational offering. To me it was not a waste to invest in me so that I could get back into the workforce. And look what happened: I ended up here.

When those on the other side like to characterise debt as this terrible thing and this terrible wastage, they are telling the people of Victoria that measures to help us, measures to support us in our daily lives are a waste that they will cut. I know that we will be going to the next election and people will really be thinking about that. They will be thinking about whether they are going to lose their urgent care clinics. Are we going to lose free tampons and pads? Are we going to lose practical assistance like the Servo Saver app? And we will, because they have quite openly said that they are going to cut the debt, so they are going to cut services that we all rely on. It has been pretty clear that that is what they are going to do.

The Leader of the Nationals spent a lot of time talking about taxes. Within it he said to us that half of those taxes are on landlords. It comes as no surprise to me that those on the other side think first about their business mates and they think first about the people who are making money. I am thinking about the people –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: I will accept your interjection, because the new rental regulator has come into effect today. However, last year we did have a ruling on how many times you could have rent rises in a year. Those on the other side are more concerned about the landlords and their business buddies than they are about people in Victoria. One of the reasons that we have put on things like the vacant residential land tax is to make sure that there are more houses available for normal people in Victoria – not their buddies who want to own five or six houses, not their business model developers. It is about people having the opportunity to own their own home. So, yes, we have put taxes on things like vacant residential land, and I think that is a jolly good thing. I think that Victorians will understand that that is there to serve them. This government has come up with so many new and interesting ideas about how we can support people in Victoria; we have heard nothing from the other side except their proposal to make cuts. They have not suggested one single solitary thing that they would do to support Victorians with the cost of living. All they have talked about is how they are going to cut things and how they see the debt that we have accumulated investing in Victorians and investing in ways to make

Victorians life easier and better as a waste. I hope that everyone going to the polls remembers that the Liberals think your comfort is a waste.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:02): I rise to speak on the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Frankston, and the first thing I will say about this MPI is when I read it, it is just typical Labor. It is one of these MPIs that talks about the things that are important to people in the community which are impacting people – the cost of living, having a safer community, making life easier – but the part it misses is the part where Labor has been in government for 12 years and has not addressed any of these issues and has just realised now that the polling is not going real well. They want to come out during an election year and say, 'One, two, three, well done, me. Aren't I great? I've come out with some policies that we may or may not keep later on.' But it is so typical of Labor to try and blame everybody else but themselves.

One of the biggest things they could make a difference on for affordability here in the state is the taxes. A few of my colleagues have already said it, and I am sure the rest of them will – they will all mention there were 66 new taxes here in the state. We have had 66 new or increased taxes in Victoria, which makes everything more expensive. You cannot expect the government to increase a tax on something and not have it be passed down the line to the final consumer; that is just how economics works. Now, these businesses that they say can afford it and can cover it are small businesses a lot of time, and, guess what, they cannot afford it. They cannot afford it, and they cannot cover it. And on the costs that go on to schools – particularly some of the girls schools when you talk about the private schools – it is one thing when you talk about education tax, but this really targets the girls schools here in the state. Why? Because the girls schools do not get the same philanthropic support and the same support from their former students that the male schools get – that is just a fact – yet they have to pay this new tax. Some of them are on paper-thin margins already, and now they have had to increase the costs for those parents. They are not rich parents because these are private schools, let me assure you. There are many people out in growth corridors who are working two or three jobs because they have come here to Australia to give their kids the best opportunity in education, and to throw an education tax on them is simply unfair.

I will go through a couple of these taxes and how they impact on every Victorian. The emergency services levy is on every single home across the state, so every home has to pay more tax because this government is stealing that money because it failed to control what was happening in emergency services in Victoria. A new tax on Uber and taxis – this really targets the most vulnerable. For those that need to use taxis and Uber to get around for their health appointments, their costs are going up. The increased luxury car tax to protect – well, it is not to protect the car industry, because the car industry is already gone here from Victoria. They have increased the luxury car tax here in this state under this government. Increasing the landfill levy – every single household has to pay this. But what is worse is charitable organisations who get things dumped at their properties have to then go on and pay this increase, and that is impacting the Salvos, St Vinnies, all of these organisations and the local op shops, which instead of giving money back to the community are having to donate it to the government because the government cannot control their own finances.

There is the EV tax, the electric vehicles tax, and we all know right at the moment many people would love to have an electric vehicle because of the cost of petrol. But no, this government wanted to tax them more. There is the mental health payroll tax, the increased tax on deaths, births and marriages, the schools tax and the domestic building insurance tax on each and every building, and land tax on properties has increased and the reduced exemption to $50,000 is down from $300,000. This is a tax on renters, who have to pay it. There is a GP tax, a car park tax and even a new tax on the punters, those that want to punt here in the state. They have increased the taxes here on each and every Victorian, and it is the growth areas that end up paying so many of these taxes. They are the ones that are covering the costs because of this government.

But what is worse is that this MPI says 'solutions that deliver real cost-of-living relief and make life easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians'. Well, if it was not April Fools' Day, I would have

thought this was an April fools' joke, because to say that it is safer here under the Labor government is nothing short of a joke. There is nothing – there is no statistic, there is no evidence – in the community that says people are safer here under this government. Police numbers: the government say it is the largest police force. The reality is there are over 1500 vacancies. How can we believe them when all of a sudden we used to have police stations open and patrols happening? And now the government is trying to convince us: 'What we're doing is we're going to reduce the hours in the police station so we can have patrols.' I do not want to quote Daniel Andrews, but why can't we have both? Because that is what we had for so many years. Police stations were open, so if you had an emergency, you could go to the police station; they would be there to assist you. At the same time we had a police van or two or three and a foot patrol and a bike patrol all out on the road, but we cannot do it anymore. Why – because we have got so many vacancies here on the rosters.

Then you add to that areas where 40 police stations have closed or have reduced hours. Clyde North is a great example. Clyde North has a new station; it just does not have the police to go with it. And the government are saying that they should be the ones that we should be thanking for it. Crime is up 14 per cent in Casey, aggravated burglary is up 21 per cent, vehicle theft is up 31 per cent, theft from retail stores is up 40 per cent, family violence with serious assaults is up 52 per cent and youth crime is up 51 per cent.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, being the lead speaker and having written the MPI, I understand that it is wideranging, but I ask you to bring the member back to it.

Brad BATTIN: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would like to offer assistance to the member for Frankston, considering he wrote it. The word 'safer', making the community safer – I am highlighting the fact that you have misled the community by putting the word 'safer' in there.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Brad BATTIN: I will go to Ashburton now. Ashburton have had their police station closed. It is located in Boroondara, with increasing crime of 13 per cent, vehicle theft up 16 per cent, prohibited weapon offences up 43 per cent, stealing from a motor vehicle up 20 per cent and aggravated burglary up 6 per cent. Colac, little country Colac – they are closed. Do you want to know why they are closed? Because they have not got enough money in the budget to fix the front door. The front door has been broken since February. Thefts from motor vehicles have gone up 36 per cent there and serious assaults up 19 per cent, but you cannot even go in the police station there. Collingwood and Fitzroy in the City of Yarra have reduced hours and were never 24-hour stations, those ones. Crime is up 5 per cent, prohibited weapons are up 22 per cent and stealing from retail stores is up 6 per cent. Caroline Springs in the City of Melton has reduced hours at the police station. Crime is up 11 per cent, motor vehicle theft is up 26 per cent, aggravated burglary is up 18 per cent and family violence serious assaults are up 25 per cent.

We have had 66 new taxes, record crime, 1500 less police, more than 40 stations closed or reduced hours, roads crumbling, hospital waitlists higher than ever, fire trucks that do not work, teachers on strike, $15 billion in corruption, cost blowouts on projects, $590 million to not host the Commonwealth Games, $1.1 billion to cancel the east–west link, $196,000 for pot plants for the Suburban Rail Loop offices, $13 million on the failed machete bin program and $74,000 to promote the Premier in her own seat on Facebook.

Are these people serious? The reason the cost-of-living crisis is here in this state, the reason that life is more difficult, the reason that Victorians are less safe, the reason everything is less affordable is quite simple: it is Labor. It is the one thing that all of these things have in common. This government has continued to increase taxes. They have had a record take – yet again – on the amount of money they are taking from every Victorian in tax here in this state. But they are not giving it back. They are not returning it to the services that we need. When you go to the hospitals in the growth corridors and you have to wait 3, 4, 5, 6 hours just to be seen, that is not a good investment from this government. When

you go out to a police station, like we have seen out in Altona North, and a victim gets there and is attacked with a knife at the station because the station is closed, that is not a good return on investment. When we see family violence continue to rise at the rate that it is, and at the same time a reduction in the Victoria Police numbers, that is not a good investment in keeping the community safer.

So may I suggest that the next time the member for Frankston wants to write an MPI in this place, he actually looks to the same benches that he is sitting on at the moment and understands what all Victorians are starting to understand – that in just over 8½ months time, they have got an opportunity to get rid of this rotten Labor government. They know that Victoria needs a fresh start. They know that our government will come in and ensure that we deliver the services. We will keep you safer, we will ensure the funding is there for the education systems and we will fix the roads. Only the Liberals can fix this crisis.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (17:12): That was quite a performance from the member for Berwick. I have got to say, this is an opposition which loves to talk about problems but never solutions. They like to talk about cutting taxes, but then what services would they be cutting if they were to actually be in government? That is the question that I have to ask back. I know here on this side of the chamber we care about people and we care about people's bottom line. That is why this matter of public importance, as the member for Frankston has put it up, is a very important one. It is great to be back in this place, and I return not just as a member of Parliament but as a mum. That is the first time I have said that in this place, but I think that it matters. Especially with this MPI, it matters, because when you are a parent, you see things differently. You feel the pressure differently and you think about every decision, not just for yourself but also for your children. I know that I saw that with my mum as I was growing up. Over the past few weeks, being back home and spending time in the community and speaking with families across Kororoit, like Caroline Springs, Truganina, Aintree and Deer Park, one thing has come up again and again, and that is the cost of living.

People are feeling it. They are feeling it at the supermarket, they are feeling it when they fill up their cars with petrol and they are feeling it when the bills come in. In a growing community like Kororoit, where so many young families are just starting out, those pressures hit even harder. But as a mum I know that it is more than that. It is the quiet calculations that you make in your head. It is deciding what can actually wait until next week. It is trying to make sure that your kids do not notice the pressure that you are under. It is wanting to give them absolutely everything while wondering how you are going to manage it all. And again I reflect back on my mother in awe, because I know that these were the struggles she went through every day, but at the time I was oblivious to it. That is exactly what families in my community today are telling me, and now I can really relate. It is not just about money, it is about the time and it is about the stress. It is about trying to hold everything together but still showing up for your kids every single day. What people want to know is simple: who is actually on their side, who understands what they are going through and who is actually going to do something about it. What I see from this side of the chamber is a government which is focused on people. It is a government that understands that cost of living is not one issue – it is everything.

In Kororoit many families rely on public transport every single day. I have spoken to parents catching the train from Caroline Springs, from Deer Park and from all over my electorate to the city to work, young people travelling to school for university, families juggling drop-offs and pick-ups, and of course everything in between. Right now public transport being free for a month is making a real difference. I went down yesterday to Parliament station and I spoke to the Rail, Tram and Bus Union members there and a few of the station officers. I asked them how people are feeling about this announcement of free public transport, and they are loving it.

I spoke to members from my own community, and they too are loving it. It is something that is actually making a difference. For many families, that is more than $200 saved a month. That money can go towards groceries, towards bills and towards school costs. It is a relief and we are building on that. We have also, as you know, made public transport permanently free for kids under 18 – again, another Labor initiative that is helping the bottom line – because getting to school, to sport or to activities

should never be a financial burden. And for seniors in Kororoit, free public transport on weekends means staying connected to their families and to their communities.

We are also taking action on fuel, because in outer suburban communities like Kororoit people rely on their cars every day. In outer suburban communities they need that in order to do the school run, get to work or get to weekend sport. Driving can often be essential, and that is why we are improving transparency around fuel prices and helping families save where they can, because even small savings all add up.

But the cost of living is not just about getting around; it is also about health care. As a mum, I know how important that is, because when your child is sick, nothing else matters. You just want to help quickly and without having to worry about the cost. That is why the free urgent care clinics, the virtual emergency department and the expanded pharmacy services matter so much. They give families options, they give families access and they reduce stress.

When we talk about cost of living, we must talk about education. I am really proud of our state – the Education State. Kororoit is a young and growing community. There are families with young children everywhere, and with that comes cost – there are uniforms, there are excursions, there are school supplies and the list goes on and on. It all adds up, and that is why we have made kinder free, saving families thousands every single year. We have boosted support for camps, for sports and for excursions so that no child misses out. An expanded school breakfast program, something that is dearly valued at many of my schools in Kororoit – and I have had the great pleasure to go out there and assist with some of the school breakfast programs – is something I would never want to see cut like Fresh Fruit Friday. Every parent wants the same thing for their child, and that is opportunity. We are also supporting families beyond the classroom – we are helping with uniforms, with devices and with everyday costs, because these are essential expenses.

We are taking action on energy bills because families across Kororoit and across Victoria are feeling the pressure too. We are taking action through the midday power saver – households can access free electricity during the middle of the day. That is practical help; that is real savings. It makes a difference and it is important.

Then of course there is housing. In Kororoit I speak to many young people and families who are trying to get into the market – people who want to stay in their community and people who want to build a future close to their families. But for many, that feels out of reach. That is why we are acting – we are reducing up-front costs, we are supporting first home buyers and we are making the system fairer, because owning a home should be achievable.

All of this comes down to priorities. While we are focused on delivering and supporting our families, those opposite are focused on themselves. As we have seen, they are divided, they are distracted and they have already made it clear what their approach will be – cuts: cuts to health, cuts to education and cuts to services that families rely on every single day. We have seen this before and we know what happens – families ultimately pay the price. The biggest cost-of-living relief that any government can provide is strong public services, health care that you can rely on, education which supports every child and infrastructure that makes people's lives easier. That is what we, the Allan Labor government, are delivering. I see this impact on my community in Kororoit every day. Families are feeling supported. They are getting some relief, knowing that their government is on their side. A government should understand your challenges and it should act, as we, the Allan Labor government, do.

I am proud to stand here today as a member of Parliament, as a representative for Kororoit and of course as a mum – one who understands the pressures that families are facing and who will continue to stand up and to fight. At the end of the day, it is our job – every single person in here who has been fortunate enough to be elected as a representative of Parliament – to make sure that Victorians have the opportunity to not just get by but to get ahead. It is our responsibility to ensure we do our best.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (17:20): What a joke – the Allan Labor government wants to move a matter today with this matter of public importance saying that it is providing cost-of-living relief to Victorians. What an insult to Victorians – this is a government that is imposing cost-of-living pain. There are a range of reasons why I say that, and I will come to all of those. At a time when Victorians are doing it so tough, this government thinks it can magically produce all the solutions against a debt that is spiralling out of control, taxes that are growing faster than the economy by several multiples and interest rates that will see 10 cents in every dollar raised go to bondholders around the world. This government wants an elephant stamp for providing cost-of-living relief – you have got to be joking. Victorians would be recoiling at this kind of temerity – that a government so bad and so incompetent could come here and pretend that it is providing cost-of-living relief. Let me state this truth for all Victorians: the Allan Labor government gives you an inch, but it takes from you a mile. Remember that. When it gives you $1, make no mistake, the Allan Labor government will take $5 from you.

It pretends it is the Education State, but we spend the least on students in government schools, and we spend the least on teachers in government schools. These are public schools. In Victoria parents are paying the highest voluntary contributions in the country, and we are supposed to believe this government when they say, 'We provide you with a free education in government schools.' Well, we know that is not true, because we know that although these payments that many thousands of parents make in public schools are voluntary – technically they are voluntary – in reality they are not, because they come at a price. If you do not make these voluntary payments in many government schools, do you know what happens? You do not get the casual relief teacher. You do not get the nursing support. You do not get the teaching aids. You do not get any of that. So can you really say it is voluntary? When the government hands out bits of money, which no-one is going to dispute or oppose, do not just look at that; look at what the government is taking from you in the form of the taxes, the debt that is out of control and the interest payments.

What concerns me most is this government pretends that it can ignore everything that is going wrong and misdirect the Victorian people with some relatively small measures that, yes, do help but that do not excuse the government's massive failure for letting Victorians down when it comes to managing this state's finances. I fear, and I am reasonably confident, that the finances of this state are worse than we fear they are. Not only do we know, for example when it comes to the infrastructure portfolio, that there have been billions of dollars in blowouts – as the Leader of the Nationals said over $50 billion in blowouts, including the CFMEU corruption, which the government knew about – but there are other problems with the net debt calculations in the budget because the government has focused so much on mega projects that have blown out.

We have a problem of neglect through the growth suburbs in the west, the north and the south-east, and in the regions in particular – but not solely in those regions. But because so much has been blown on these mega projects to get them to delivery, what we have seen is neglect of the rest of the infrastructure and asset portfolio. What happens when your assets are run down and when you do not have the money for renewal, for upgrades and for repairs to assets across the portfolio? Do you know what happens? Their value falls and depreciation goes through the roof. So when the government talks about net debt, which squares off our total borrowings with the value of the assets against which those borrowings are to be defrayed, you actually have a misleading figure. I do not think the budget accurately reflects how big our net debt actually is, because like everybody else will know, your net debt does depend on the valuations.

With so much neglect of the rest of the capital portfolio, none of us as Victorians can have confidence that, whether it is the general government sector at $192 billion by 2029 – or when you take into account the public nonfinancial corporation sector as well, which should be included, you end up with net debt by 2029 of well over $230 billion. Normally you do not include that against the general government sector, because it is often thought that these entities, water boards and the rest, have cost recovery and can manage their finances. But we know this government is so derelict financially, so delinquent financially, that it rips capital out and rips dividends out of these bodies, so you cannot treat

them in that way. To get a better reading of our true debt position – and this is important for Victorians, because it is that net debt which means you are waiting longer for a hospital, you are waiting longer for an ambulance. It means your school does not have the teachers or the facilities you deserve. It means that you are driving on roads that are not carworthy and create not only financial risks for you but health and safety hazards. It is very real for people. This debt, this mismanagement, has an effect on all of our daily lives. For this government to come into this house and want congratulations for the measures it offers by way of cost-of-living relief, when so much else is denying Victorians the quality of life and the standard of living they enjoy, it is ridiculous, and it is offensive for Victorians who are doing it really tough. In addition to the risks I talked about – about the degradation in our capital base and asset base, because there has not been that investment by this government – we also know that the forecasts in the budget are just off. They are way off pitch. The net debt figure and the fiscal program that this government has said it has – its five-step plan to rescue the budget, which is nowhere near on track – depends on growth being at 2 per cent or above. Well, we know in 2024–25, last financial year, it came in at nearly half that, at 1.1 per cent. How can the government say that it is reining in net debt as a proportion of gross state product when our growth figures are half? We live in a $700 billion economy. To be off by a per cent in your growth forecast is a lot of money, and it means your net debt figure and your commitment to your own fiscal plan is falling apart. It cannot be believed.

What this government has also done is leave us with no capacity to deal with the rainy days. Even before the conflict in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, we knew that interest rates were going up – and there are more interest rates to come. We know that the combination of the two interest rate rises from the official cash rate, of 3.85 per cent now up to 4.1 per cent, amounts to nearly half a billion dollars extra. And you can go to the sensitivity analysis in the budget to verify that yourself. The government knows that every increase in the official cash rate and bond rates across the world will have a massive impact on the debt that Victorians have to carry, because it is not the Premier who carries it, it is not the Deputy Premier who carries it – it is Victorians right across our great state, who unfairly are saddled with all the cuts that this government is making to services because it does not have the money. Whether it is closures of police stations, whether it is waiting lists for surgeries in our public healthcare system, whether it is the shortage of doctors, shortage of police officers, ambulance response times, whether it is the tragedy we see in our child protection system and in our family violence system, where the data is going north, not south – after 10 or more years of this government, on every measure, life is getting harder under this government. On every measure, the cost of living is going up. On every measure, the standard of living in this state is going down under this government. It is why we will be calling on the Victorian people and imploring them to take their opportunity to vote for change so we can fix this state. We can rescue it from the incompetence and the financial delinquency of this government, which is hurting Victorians. When this government comes to this chamber today, putting forward a matter of public importance saying how good it is that they are offering cost-of-living relief, let me remind all Victorians: when this Allan Labor government gives you a dollar, rest assured it will take from you $5.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (17:30): I feel I should take the temperature in the room down somewhat, because right now there is a growing anxiety amongst people. They feel it in the pit of their stomachs. When we turn on the news, we see a world that looks terrifying at times. We see conflict in the Middle East, which is unpredictable, and even though it is half a world away it is having a real impact here. People see this and they feel it, and they get that knot in the pit of their stomachs, wondering what impact it will have on them. I am so empathic for them; I feel it too. And I know people I love, people who I am close to, the constituents across Monbulk and people across Victoria and Australia are also feeling this, and that is why it is comforting to know that we have the adults in the room in charge. We are not there shouting; we are not there screaming. There is no performance here. We are talking about real cost-of-living measures that make a real difference for people who are hurting, who are doing it tough.

In certain areas they are concerned about filling up their petrol tanks, which is why we brought in free public transport for the month of April. People I know who have not caught public transport in the

past decade have just started to in the last two days. They have told me about it. It is already having a direct impact. And it is not just having an impact on them, because they are able to travel for free for a month, and they know this, on their commute to work. They have told me it is going to help them over the school holidays. It will help them over Easter, when they have got kids to try and entertain, but they cannot fill up the tank full of fuel and get them to wherever they want to go. So they are going to make an adventure of things. They are going to catch the train all together, and it will not cost them a penny to do so. They will pack their bag with the sandwiches they have made at home, and they will have really affordable, great days out, and we have helped with that. I know it is a small measure, but it is meaningful.

It also has another wonderful effect, and that is that the less fuel being used in cars to ferry us around from one point to another, the less fuel that we are using, the more fuel there is for farmers in regional areas. I did note that there have been those opposite decrying our free public transport and saying, 'Well, this doesn't really help people in regional areas.' Yet the member for Eureka duly pointed out, and as I pointed out on my social media platforms when comments were being made asking, 'But what about us in the regions?' – and I can understand the question – the Victorian Farmers Federation wanted this. They wanted this because every drop of fuel that is saved means that there is more fuel for farmers. That is an essential service we need. We need our food. We need our farmers to be able to do what they need to do to feed us all. It is incredibly important, and that is part of the way that we are helping.

There is so much else we have been doing. My wonderful colleagues here on this side of the chamber have been speaking at length about cost-saving measures, and there is a plethora that we have been enacting, and not just now. It is not a reaction to what is going on now. We have been embedding these cost-of-living relief measures for quite some time, because we have understood that things have been tough. COVID was a huge global shock. It was a huge global shock with ripples that continued on. And now we have a new global shock that we are dealing with, but we are dealing with it. We have years of experience of knowing how to deal with shocks when they come and being measured and being reasonable and being, as I said, the adults in the room. We are not jumping up and screaming.

We can be trusted to put Victorians' best interests at heart, and that is why it is a concern to all of us on this side of the chamber when we hear about the $11.5 billion budget black hole that the Leader of the Opposition announced when she was Shadow Treasurer, because we all know that means cuts to services. It is cuts to the relief that we provide working families. What cuts will it be? If we look at what the opposition cut last time, because the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour, we know they actually slashed funding from police. They slashed funding from our schools. They cut much-needed supports that were there. They absolutely slashed them and left people bereft where they had had supports before.

I have some notes here, and I will refer to them, because the numbers are extraordinary. They cut more than a billion dollars from TAFE and shut down 22 campuses. They cut more than a billion from our education system. They cut the whooping cough vaccination program – ponder that for a moment – all to save some money. They defunded 25 community mental health providers. They say they actually want to cut public transport projects. That means 24,000 Victorians out of a job, 70,000 homes that will not be built and a city that is left behind. They have said the SEC is gone if they win. What they did when they were last in government was they cut $70 million from V/Line. I wonder how the Nationals would feel about that. Seventy million dollars was cut from V/Line by the former coalition government. They have actually said they will rip up our activity centres. That means 300,000 new homes potentially cut. What is the greatest issue with housing? It is a lack of it. We have literally been devoting the past few years to working on how we increase housing supply, and that is why we are now one of the most affordable cities in the nation to buy and rent in.

I have heard those opposite mentioning lately – it is clearly in their notes at the moment to talk about it – incentives for investors. Investors is another word for landlords. If there are more landlords out there that means fewer people who own the home, or have it mortgaged, that they live in. We have

created a situation here in Melbourne where we have got more first home buyer applicants here in Melbourne than anywhere else in the nation – that is by design. We are making it easier for people to be able to get into the housing market and actually own a piece of their own; to have something they call their own; to be paying the mortgage off, not the landlord. There is still a place for people who want to rent. Not everyone wants to buy or is in a position to buy at a point in time. It is also really important to let people know, young people in particular but also people who have never owned a home, that they can and they are more able to do it here. We are not done yet. We know we have got more to do, but we are on a plan, and we are continuing along that path to make it as easy as possible for people to achieve the dream of actually having their own place that is just theirs.

For those who are renting we have made it easier for them to do so with greater certainty. We have ensured that there is more dignity for them in renting. We have had some great reforms in this area, because we take it seriously, we take our role of government seriously. We are here to make everyone's existence better wherever we can and that is what we do when we invest in them.

Some of our other cost-of-living supports I know have made real differences. If you look at our schools and you look at free glasses for children, do you know how many children could not read and had behavioural issues? They were acting up in class because they could not read the board. They could not see what was happening, so they were disengaging. Free glasses for kids is just a no-brainer when it means that the parents do not have to pay for the glasses, because they are not cheap. That is an essential service that they are being provided at no cost to them, along with free dental checks for students. I have seen the free dental vans at my local schools – they are magnificent. I was told by them that some kids had never, ever been to the dentist in their life at the age of 11. That was their first time going, and that was critical because they picked up issues with their oral health and they were able to address them quickly. That is a huge cost-of-living support that we give there. I know I have spoken so many times at length about the free breakfast clubs and they are critical. I will not go on at length about those, because once I start talking about it I tend to get a little bit too passionate and I go on for quite a while about free breakfast, because you cannot learn when you are really hungry, and that is just a simple fact. That has been another relief for people, and a lot of those children, when they need it they get sent home with meals that they take home to the family if they need it as well.

Some of our health measures have been extraordinary – for example, the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. I just want to give this a shout-out. I have been working really hard to try and highlight the importance of this, especially in my area where getting to an emergency department can be a good 40- to 50-minute drive. That free service on your phone or your laptop where you are triaged by an emergency doctor or registered nurse here in Victoria who tells you what the next steps are that you need to take, that is an invaluable service – completely free – along with the urgent care clinics that we have co-partnered with the federal government on as well. These are all things helping people in a cost-of-living crisis, because they should not have to decide whether or not they put money in the tank or go to the doctor. We are helping out in so many ways. I am proud of what we are doing. We have got more to do.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:40): The matter of public importance presented to the house today is a doozy, an absolute doozy. The member for Lowan, who unfortunately has arrived slightly late to the chamber I understand, also knows what a doozy the matter of public importance is. But let me just humour the chamber first. The MPI states:

> That this house notes that Victorian families are facing growing pressure in their daily lives as the cost of living and global events put household budgets under strain and only the Allan Labor government is responding with new and practical solutions –

spell 'practical' for me, one member on the other side, please –

> that deliver real cost-of-living relief and make life easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians.

Honestly, it must be April Fools' Day. There is one thing that all Victorians can agree on: under the Allan Labor government, Victorians are less safe, their household budgets are far less than they

absolutely should be and it is less easy to get a roof over your head. Life is harder under the Allan Labor government, and that is a direct result of poor policy decisions by the Allan Labor government. This matter of public importance that has been presented by the member for Frankston today is an April fool's joke. It must be – mustn't it? It absolutely must be. I know this will come as a surprise, particularly to those on this side, but you would think that this MPI is being presented as a way to pat the government on the back for a job well done in an election year. Oh, please! Victorians actually know and those that are actually engaged in their communities and in touch with reality understand that it is a joke. This is about whether people in regional Victoria can actually afford to live and can actually afford to run their businesses, whether it is in the agriculture sector, or whether it is a small business.

The amount of emails and messages I have had this week from small hospitality businesses and other small businesses, accommodation tourism operators as well, who are already under pressure – I know pressure creates diamonds, but not in this case. It is creating incredible stress for business owners, particularly in the regions, who will not be able to charge an EFTPOS surcharge when they are taking money from customers. That is an extra $1600 per terminal per month that small businesses have to find. I will tell you what else, and this is something that has perhaps escaped the eyes of the federal Labor government in particular, but the removal of the fuel excise in this country – and I said this earlier in the week – will help our primary producers who are bleeding at the moment, as long as we keep the fuel rebate, or the tax credits, because last time the excise was removed, so was that rebate. My husband, a farmer, got a notification today, and guess what else has been halved: the fuel tax credits for primary producers. Guess how much by: 26 cents. So there you go, just another thing that makes life harder for Victorians – much harder under the Allan Labor government. They know that now, after the past decade, life has got harder, and it is the hardest it has ever been for primary producers in this state – the hardest it has ever been.

The amount of regulation, the weather – and there is not much that any side of politics can do about the weather; that is what you get when you do business with God, unfortunately. But there are things post weather events that can be done there. There are troubles with fuel supply that we have been accused of being alarmist about, when we know that fuel bowsers are running dry, because I saw it.

Tim McCurdy interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Alarmist, we were. There are fuel supply shortages and not only the cost of fertiliser but the ability now to get fertiliser – you just cannot. The price of water – water should be prioritised for those that are producing food, not for water speculators to drive up the price. There are just so many pressure points, and not just for farmers. Guess what happens when farmers are under so much pressure: every single Victorian pays for it. Even in small business with those EFTPOS surcharges that I was talking about earlier, to recoup that extra cost, that price just gets added to the price of their goods. It is as simple as that. Victorians just simply cannot take much more of this.

I find the MPI that has been presented before the house today to be obviously an April Fool's joke but quite comical and offensive to Victorians. When I read it yesterday I did actually have a little chuckle to myself. I thought, 'April Fools' Day doesn't start until midnight. They're a little early.' No, no, it is for real. Every Victorian is paying the price for the mismanagement over every sector by this Labor government. We are not the Education State, we are the crisis state. We have a housing crisis. We have a fuel crisis, obviously. We have a crime crisis. We have a cost-of-living crisis. We have an emergency services crisis, because we know that they are not being funded as well and their fleets desperately need upgrading. Soon we will have a food crisis because our farmers are absolutely under the pump, because the farmers are the only ones that sell their goods at wholesale, pay for everything at retail and pay the freight both ways.

What a great segue. Let us talk about freight. We could bring those costs down if the Murray Basin rail project was ever completed. That is another thing that the Allan Labor government stuffed up – a complete and utter mess. If that was actually completed, it would take a lot of pressure off farmers

again with their transport needs if they could actually get goods to port for export in a timely manner. Instead, where is that money going? Into the big holes under the city and into the pockets of criminals and organised crime and to state-sponsored strippers on Big Build sites. I am sure Victorians are also giving the Allan Labor government a good pat on the back and saying, 'Job well done.' They will remember in November. Make no mistake, they will remember in November how hard life has been for them, particularly this year. They simply cannot take any more. Victorians are sick of it. To be fair – and we have seen it recently – they are sick of the silence. Hardworking Victorians are often too busy – head down, bum up, working away for their families, putting food on the table and a roof over their head. But they are so sick of it now and they are getting very vocal, and so they should be. I am right there with them, because we need to be vocal. Everyone needs to know how important every area of Victoria is to this state's economy, to this state's food security and to this state's supply chain, because once that supply chain is broken, this whole state and this whole nation will fall to pieces, mark my words.

For the Allan Labor government and the member for Frankston to write up this very comical pat-on-the-back matter of public importance today, it should absolutely make every single Victorian absolutely furious. It also illustrates how out of touch with reality the Allan Labor government and every member of it are. They have their heads buried in the sand. That is why we got accused of making alarmist claims when we addressed the fuel shortages in the regions last week. The Nationals know. Every single one of the Nationals team knows. We live it. Like I said, my husband is a farmer. My father is a farmer. The member for Lowan knows it. She is out in the regions as well. The Leader of the Nationals knows it. The members for Euroa, for Shepparton, for Morwell, for Ovens Valley – even the member for Gippsland East knows it.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Even him, with his peripheral vision. He knows it because he is engaged with his community. The Nationals will always be in touch with reality and in touch with our communities, and we are here to fight for them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Werribee, the house has given me an opportunity to remind members that anything can be considered a prop. From Lindell in 2009:

> Anything can be used as a prop; it depends on the manner in which the object is used. For example, when a member deliberately held up a report, the Speaker ruled it was a prop.

Props are disorderly. I am sure the notice paper slipped out of your hand, member for Mildura, and I thank the Leader of the Nationals for picking it up, otherwise it would have been a tripping hazard.

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:51): Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for that OH&S reminder. I think that is particularly important, particularly when we are talking about how we are supporting working families and making sure that we are supporting them in what are tough times. I will take up something that the member for Mildura raised: that people on this side have their heads buried in the sand. I do have a little bit of time for the member for Mildura. I have spent a lot of time in Mildura – my family is from there – and I have seen the disadvantage up in the part of the world that she represents. I have also seen disadvantage that no-one should see in the part of the world that I represent, Werribee. I have seen kids who have not been able to come to school with a school uniform. I have seen kids who have not eaten for a week. In fact there will be a lot of people this week at schools in wellbeing teams sending home packages of food to families that are doing it tough over the school holidays. This is something that I have seen firsthand, and I do take some umbrage at the member for Mildura saying that our heads are buried in the sand.

I have seen it firsthand, and I have worked with people who are doing it tough, in particular in Werribee. We have some of the lowest socio-economic indexes for areas (SEIFA) – which is a fancy way of saying 'disadvantaged' – scores in the City of Wyndham, but also particularly across Melbourne, with scores well under 900, which fits in a lot of categories of disadvantage. In areas like

Werribee around Market Road, Heathdale and the southern part of Wyndham Vale, we have poverty. So cost-of-living support is not just about what we see at the bowser or what we see with middle-class families across some of the leafy parts of Melbourne. It is so vital for these people. I just want to bring people back to this as we come to the end of this matter of public importance. There are people who, let us be honest, will probably not be watching us here this afternoon but who are doing it incredibly tough and live in poverty. It is so important that they have a government that is on their side, and only Labor governments are on the side of these people who live in this disadvantage.

Like many other members of the government side, I just ran a tour with some of my locals from Werribee, and I had a chance to talk a little bit about what we do. I said I was speaking on this matter this afternoon about the cost of living, which immediately sparked a conversation amongst the 10 or so people that were with me from the Werribee electorate around what cost-of-living support means. I asked them in one word, 'What does that mean?' Daniel, Rosie, Natalie, Tanya, Nina, Joanne and Farhan offered me these thoughts on what cost-of-living support meant for them. For them it meant survival – that was one of the words they used. Another word they used was 'healthy,' which I think is particularly important for some of the initiatives that I will talk to in just a moment. One of them mentioned it makes people happy. I think happiness is underrated as a score. We talk about Bhutan and their figures around gross national happiness. I think the idea of happiness is something that, despite being a government with lots of bureaucracy, we should always have an eye to in our community.

Another word that was mentioned was the idea of dignity. There is dignity in supporting people who are doing it tough. We need to give them that dignity to be able to have that choice for themselves. It is not about just handouts, it is about supporting them in their everyday life and the way that they choose to go about it. Someone mentioned Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which as a teacher sparked my interest because we talk a lot about Maslow's hierarchy – it is the base level, that safety and our shelter at the base level of Maslow's hierarchy. But the one that stood out for me was something that Farhan told me. Farhan is a great guy from the Savana estate in Wyndham Vale. He said it is about the future. Cost-of-living support is not just about what we face here immediately, what we face as a result of the arch-conservative Donald Trump's reckless actions in the Middle East. I have no time for Iran, but we can be certain that the result of what we are seeing here now is because of very, very unthought-through actions by the American President. They talk about the butterfly effect – well, here we have a very, very orange butterfly flapping his wings, dropping bombs on schools, and we are now seeing the effects all the way here in our Pacific corner of the world.

Cost-of-living support is so vital for our community. When we talk about some of those different initiatives, I think to the immediate initiatives, like free public transport, which I, along with many other people from the Werribee electorate, have been taking advantage of over the last couple of days. I have been taking the train in to Parliament and the bus – shout-out to the 181. I have seen more people on the train, and I caught up with a couple of my ex-students on the V/Line last night. It is always scary when you see ex-students; you never know what they are going to say to you. But they were talking to me about how every day they have to travel to Deakin in Burwood, and it takes them about 2 hours. But to have that transport for free over this month means that they were able to start planning on putting that money away so they can get some driving lessons. I thought that was a particularly cool, practical way that this free public transport is helping my community. With free public transport we have heard a lot from those opposite, particularly those in the Nationals, around how it is not necessarily going to help the regions. Well, it does help the regions. It helps the regions so much that the Victorian Farmers Federation have come out in support of it. In fact some could credit them with initiating this whole conversation around free public transport, and I do thank them for that because it is a way of thinking about how we empower people in what they already do. Rather than just giving them something, rather than just giving them cash, rather than just giving them help, let us look at how people are going about their day and take away costs in what they have to do every day.

That is also what we are doing with things like our fair fuel plan. I have said a lot in this chamber that over 50 per cent of people in my electorate have to drive for various reasons. They are tradies, they have to take their kids to different child care or there are multiple drop-offs – which we are working on, by the way, with our kindergartens in schools program. But we know that fuel and car usage is a thing in my electorate in Werribee. I have stood up here since the very start, since we saw those first murmurs from the market around fuel and called for fuel support through our fair fuel plan and highlighted that work that the government is doing, because again it is about using the market to make sure that people are empowered to make choices over how they access that market and how they engage with it. It is potentially a little bit neoliberal to be working within a market framework to be able to support people. You would think that those opposite would love something a little bit neoliberal, but I think the arch-conservatives on their side are calling the tune when it comes to their approach to this, because there is a big risk.

It is not just our free public transport and it is not just our fair fuel plan. It is also things like our free kindergarten. It is also things like our free TAFE, and the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which I know firsthand supports some of those most disadvantaged kids that I mentioned in those SEIFA scores earlier living in those areas. I know firsthand – in fact we announced the extension of the program at Wyndham Central College that has been utilising the CSEF to help those kids go on outdoor ed. It is such an important program. There are Get Active Kids vouchers, which are in hot demand across all my basketball and netball clubs in Werribee, and things like our Smile Squad. There are the financial counselling services which we have offered in Watton Street, one of which I went to visit with the Minister for Local Government not too long ago.

All of these things are so important because they help people in what they already have to do every day. I have to point out that these are at risk; we have seen it before with conservative, small-minded governments that these are some of the first things to get cut, but they have such a deep impact in communities like mine. We do not have our heads in the sand. We are out there in our communities every day. I am out there in my community every day, speaking to people like the people who came on my tour earlier about what cost-of-living support means for them. So that is what it is at risk with a Liberal government. That is what a Labor government is supporting, and I commend this matter to the house.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (18:01): I also believe that cost-of-living support for Victorians is something that this government is all about, and those opposite, with what they said or, sorry, what they yelled – the volume does not make up for a lack of content – the people on this side are the ones that are busy putting in place the initiatives that actually help Victorian households, and they should stop yelling and let us get on with the job of helping Victorians.

Bills

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (18:01): I am really glad to have more time to talk about this bill, because it is a really important one for my community. What this bill does is it shows that we are a party that puts buyers and Victorians at the centre of regulation to make sure their protection financially, physically and mentally is the key objective of what we are doing. When you speak to the Whittlesea SES about the call-outs that they have in our community, so many of their call-outs are to first-time callers who, in the event of a large storm, discover for the first time that their home has not been built properly. It is only when the rain starts coming through the roof and the Whittlesea SES needs to come and help them that they discover that their builder has not done the right thing. For people who find themselves in that situation after having outlaid so much money, it can be really, really devastating. The purpose of this legislation is to give them protections so it is not something that

they have to face alone and not something that they have to struggle against through the system to get the help they need; rather, dodgy builders will be punished for dodgy things done dirt cheap.

The Liberals are going against protections for people that are building their family home – let that sink in. They say that increased protections will make housing more expensive. I just want to make two points around their contention. The first is that the cost of having to fix and maintain a dodgy house can be debilitating for people, so when you talk about the cost of housing, they are not factoring in what their willingness to let dodgy builders run rampant will do to Victorians' back pockets. The other thing that they are failing to consider is that supply is of course the main driver of the housing costs, and the Liberals are reducing supply, and the way that they propose to do that is by gatekeeping suburbs that are close to amenities, public transport, health, education and the like.

Something else about their housing policy, which we should see through the prism of their reaction to this bill, is that not only are they gatekeeping housing in their suburbs, but they want to rush housing development in mine, in the outer suburbs. We have spaced out the development of new estates. Their desire to rush development in suburbs like mine is not to benefit the homebuyer, it is to benefit developers. This is their housing policy: cut protections for Victorians and rush development with no infrastructure contribution. And who is benefiting from that? Remember the Whittlesea SES – they are the ones who end up consoling the homebuyer when they discover that their home is faulty. Those opposite, not once, not twice, but here we are, three times – three times the cock crowed – do not want to support increased protections for buyers. They do not want to see dodgy builders held accountable for the things that they do.

Those opposite are saying that the reason they are not supporting this bill is because there should be more consultation. That is purely the only rationale that they have given. But what those opposite know but are failing to mention is that consultation started in May last year, and there have been over 60 different consultations that have taken place in the development of this bill, with building groups and consumer groups, so their rationale for wanting to stop this bill is baseless, absolutely baseless. The reason why they are trying to do it, as we have covered earlier, is because – and we have seen it here from them before – they do not want to see increased protections for people building a home. They do not want to see anything that will stop a rushed version of housing development in the outer suburbs. Ask yourself, who does that benefit? Who do those positions benefit? It is not Victorians. That is why this bill must go ahead despite those opposite seeking to slow it down or indeed to stop it, because no working family or any family should be forced to take on the responsibility, the cost and the time to fix defective building work. As I said, placing the consumer at the centre of this regulatory approach means that we always have them at the heart of what we are doing and that when decisions are being made about regulations and enforcing regulations the consumer is thought of first, and that is absolutely the way it should be.

This party was built by working people to benefit working people, and reforms like these are how we support them even when those opposite try to stop us. It is absolutely paramount to protect the health and safety of Victorians, so when people are doing the wrong thing, those bad actors need to face consequences, and it is important that they do, because they need to stop undermining the good builders that are in the sector, the good builders who with pride create homes for families. It is the dodgy builders that we are focused on through this bill, who are breaking the rules on purpose, basically, who are cutting corners to make a profit out of people's misery. We will not stand for it, which is why this bill is so important for Victorians and why I will celebrate when it passes the next house.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (18:09): The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 – well, welcome to just another noose around the building industry's neck in the state of Victoria. We have a housing crisis that has accelerated every single year that this government has been in control of the state. It is a housing crisis that has seen the average cost to build – whether it is a house and land package in the outer suburbs or regional Victoria or a high-rise

apartment in an apartment complex in the inner or outer rings of Melbourne – reach average base-level prices of somewhere between $800,000 and $1 million.

We have heard Labor MP after Labor MP saying, 'We're doing this for the workers, we're doing this for average families and we're doing this for the people that we stand up for.' Do they understand what the average income is of the people they say they are trying to help? Can I tell you, Acting Speaker Addison? Hopefully you know this already and as a member of the government will have been briefed on this. The average Victorian worker cannot take out a mortgage for $800,000 or $1 million. The average worker – the working poor and the people that this government say they are wanting to help with legislation like this – can afford around $600,000 max, if they are lucky. That is the figure we are talking about.

Fortunately for some Victorians, if they live in country communities such as my own, they might get a small house and land package at around $585,000 to $590,000. That is an exception to the rule; it is certainly not available in our bigger centres and is certainly not available in our metropolitan areas. The question is: why is it so much more expensive today to build a house than it was before? Well, the first thing we have learned in the process of listening to the industry – unlike the government – is that this massive tome, which has been introduced this week, has been given to the people that this government must work with: the builders, the plumbers, the electricians, the plasterers, the painters, the installers and the landscapers. Everyone who has a part in creating good, decent, affordable homes for Victorians needs to be listened to. They were shown this enormous tome two weeks ago. This has huge ramifications. What happens when governments create uncertainty? They increase risk and they increase cost, and they are going to make it even more difficult.

The question, quite simply, is: why would a government that say that they want to look after the workers, that they want to look after Victorians, that they want to solve the housing crisis and that they want affordable housing be so deaf to the people in the industry that want to create affordable, good-value homes for Victorians? Why would they ignore them? I can tell you this: no-one in this chamber has the skills, expertise and knowledge of the current building industry to sit there and make judgements on this. You must listen to the industry, and that is why I absolutely support the motion from the Shadow Minister for Housing and Building, the member for Caulfield, that we amend this until we have had proper consultation.

There is only one way to help cure the housing crisis in Victoria, and that is to force the cost of building down. We live on the most empty, uninhabited continent other than Antarctica on the whole planet. Land availability is not our ultimate issue, but the cost of building absolutely is. This government presents no path forward with these enormous changes that will not see downward pressure for builders, Victorian families and people desperate for a home. While that average cost of construction sits at $800,000 to $1 million just for something very basic, we cannot help to solve the housing crisis here in Victoria.

The member for Yan Yean before me made much of the fact that the Liberals want to make housing all in favour of the builders, are not looking after families and are rewarding dodgy builders. Well, can I say, that is the biggest load of nonsense that only someone who has no idea of how the industry works could come out with. This government, with whatever it touches, has a habit – a nasty, nasty, terrible habit – of organising regulations and legislation to demonise an entire industry for the actions of very few. We know as a fact that most building and housing projects are done well and competently, without unnecessary hold-ups in courts or through regulation.

There are some parts of the industry that have had problems, and we have certainly seen them in recent years. But these problems have arisen because the government has single-handedly failed to regulate in the areas it needs to regulate. It has failed to invest in the monitoring of issues such as plumbing installation and waterproofing and other key elements to a good construction. They have failed to do that. So what they are trying to do through this legislation is move all that risk back onto the industry. When the government does that, when it forces all those extra costs and uncertainty onto the industry,

the consumer has to pay, and that is who is paying for this. Rather than helping the consumer, rather than helping families get into homes, we are going to make it more difficult.

One of the key elements in this, from some of the consultation that I have managed to do over the week or so that we have had this legislation, is the financial elements in it, which once again have been devised quite possibly from the government consulting with large builders and large industry. The building and construction industry is a very dynamic industry, and the reason we want a dynamic building industry is it provides lots of competition. The building and construction industry has large, big-tier builders, mid-tier builders, all the way down to small family-operated businesses that may only create one to three homes a year. But it is that vibrancy, it is that dynamism that we actually need, because it helps keep costs down. Everyone I have spoken to says the uncertainty that this legislation has brought in, without proper consultation, means that a whole raft of particularly smaller family-owned regional builders and country builders – people that do not have the resources and the backing of large institutional investors or others – will be put at a huge disadvantage.

I make the point that no-one wants someone who cannot afford to build a house or has no backing to build it, but issues around insurance, issues around reputation – if a building company has demonstrated a long-term, fault-free existence in the industry, has produced good-quality homes without fault and has worked within the systems and obliged the government regulators, then there must be some credence given to that impact and they should not be penalised for it. So the concept that in many parts of the state we will see building companies put to one side and taken out of the system, either permanently or on an ad hoc basis, makes no sense. This clearly reeks of a government that has failed to do its homework to fully understand the industry and to work with those in the industry to get good outcomes. Unlike some of the contributions from those opposite this afternoon, who are hell-bent on demonising some players in the construction industry, we on this side believe that most people in the construction industry are good people. They are good people, they are good operators, and they want to leave a legacy of a well-built home, a well-finished home, a well-painted home, a well-roofed home, a well-wired home. They do not have an incentive to make a mess and leave disaster behind them. Unfortunately, this legislation has built so much cost confusion and regulation in to catch very few people but complicates and adds cost to the much larger majority of people.

Finally, with the minute or so I have left, the Building and Plumbing Commission was an invention of this government and, right or wrong, aggregating all our building regulators under one body has some merit. However, they are already hugely stressed and behind in their capacity to keep up with the demands and the concerns of the community. This legislation, again, without knowledge of how much better resourced it will be, how much extra funding and support it will have, will be left clogged and burdened with ongoing complaints, because one of the issues, with the widening of scope that it now has, is leaving one underfunded and poorly resourced organisation to deal with a potentially massive increase in its workload.

In conclusion, I support very much our amendment to see this bill laid over until it has had proper discussion with the industry, to iron out some of these issues, to restore confidence and to de-risk this policy for the betterment of housing in Victoria.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (18:19): I rise to support the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. Isn't it remarkable that every time we bring a bill to this chamber that is about supporting consumers, supporting hardworking home owners, renters and families that are working hard to save or build or construct their first home, dwelling or apartment, on this side of the house Labor stands with working people to get a good deal, a fair deal and a good-quality home built, but every time we bring a bill in here that supports consumers, what do the Liberal–National party do? They stand with the big end of town. They stand with their big construction mates. They stand against consumers and the best interests of consumers every single time.

In fact the foundation bill which led to this bill, of course, was the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 that we moved some time ago through this chamber, which led to the creation of the new Building and Plumbing Commission. The Liberals opposed that bill. They opposed that bill, and today they pretend they are sort of supporting this bill, but they are moving a motion to say, 'Let's defer this bill until we conduct further consultation.' It is a never-ending pipeline of consultation for these guys. It is their way of saying, 'No, we don't support it, because we support the big business, big-end-of-town construction companies to make profits over the hard-earned savings of home owners.'

Just look at the stats and the facts here as to why we need to progress with this bill as soon as possible. The Centre for International Economics estimates that Victoria has 1.04 defects per dwelling. That is higher than the national average. For apartments, rates of defects are 2.13 per apartment, and this is estimated to cost consumers – the guys, the people, the hardworking people saving to buy and build these homes and apartments – cumulatively $675 million annually.

Just look at the stats from Cladding Safety Victoria. We went through the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 yesterday. Fifty per cent of the buildings in the cladding Victoria program had non-cladding issues. As they were going through auditing all the buildings that were part of that program with cladding issues, 50 per cent were also found to have non-cladding issues, mainly around water egress issues, water leakage issues and waterproofing issues. Seventy-eight per cent of those buildings were less than 10 years old. Building and Plumbing Commission data also says that 60 per cent of complaints relate to defects and noncompliance, so 60 per cent of their work is focused on defective building and construction work because of dodgy builders, because of poor workmanship. That is what this bill really is all about. It is simply about strengthening those protections for consumers to make sure we are lifting those standards of building and of construction.

It is also actually about saving money, not just for consumers but also for builders too, because when you have all these sort of defects, you have a lot more disputes going through the Building and Plumbing Commission. You have a lot more disputes going to the various entities and authorities, whether it is the local municipal council or whether it is VCAT and other avenues, consumer affairs, you name it. This costs time and money, not just for the families but also for the businesspeople and the tradies that are involved here. This bill is just as much about helping those tradespeople and construction businesses save money as it is for the families and hardworking people in our communities, because at the moment we are in a cost-of-living crisis, as we all know. We heard that from the motion earlier today. Families are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, and that has been compounded by what is happening in the Middle East. That will have a flow-on effect, whether we like that or agree or not, to the construction industry through materials and supplies, and through those global supply chains as well. So this is also about protecting consumers from the outset as best as we can with respect to those issues and protecting them from acquiring debilitating debts for those unforeseen rectification works as well. This is going to help a lot of people seeking to get into the market and who are in the market.

I would like to just turn to one constituent in particular who has contacted me, whose issue I would like to draw the house's attention to. In January of 2026 I was contacted by a local resident, Arbab. Arbab contacted me to seek assistance in relation to his case of defective building construction works associated with his property and to seek state government consideration for further policy reform, which he is very passionate about, in this space to better protect home owners and consumers whilst better holding those dodgy builders and tradespeople to account. As per the information that he has provided me, he has gone through quite an ordeal, which has caused a lot of financial but also emotional and wellbeing issues for him and his family. Between 2017 and 2018 the off-the-plan purchase of his property occurred, with the permit issued in May 2018, with the settlement completed. The builder was appointed and the building permit was issued for the townhouses, one of which he purchased off the plan. Between 2020 and 2021, he states, defects began to be noticed once he eventually moved in, including leaks and cracking throughout the property, following which he sought

to engage the builder in good faith to have it rectified, but the builder totally ceased engagement, totally stopped talking to him.

Correspondence from the Building and Plumbing Commission from 5 December 2025 – this has been a drawn-out saga for him – acknowledged and particularly substantiated many of the defective building concerns, including that the footings of the property appeared to have subsided, which appears to have led to the cracking in the brickwork. The balcony waterproofing had also failed, which had rendered the balcony uninhabitable, with Merri-bek City Council, I understand, later issuing an emergency order as a result of that work. Between 2022 and 2026, notwithstanding these issues and attempts by Arbab to engage with the builder to have these issues rectified again, I was informed that the builder refused to continue to engage or return to the property, with Arbab subsequently escalating the matter extensively through all his available channels, including VCAT, even the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. In 2024 and 2026, Arbab informs me, through these efforts the Building and Plumbing Commission ultimately investigated and found a 16(4A) breach and sought to discipline the builder. However, they confirmed that they had no rectification jurisdictional power at the time to enforce rectifications and subsequently closed the file. As a result of those experiences and extensive engagement, Arbab encouraged the government, through me as the local member, to seek further policy reform and legislative reform, and that is exactly what this bill is all about. It may not, sadly, address Arbab's issue as he has experienced it, but going forward consumers in his shoes will be much more strongly protected to prevent such circumstances.

We know the building industry does touch on every aspect of our lives directly and indirectly. It is responsible for our homes, our hospitals, our workplaces, kinders, TAFEs, our transport network, our sporting clubs, parks, community facilities and so much more. But it is also an economic driver, so we need to make sure we continue to lift those standards to make sure it can continue to sustain that economic activity for our state. It contributes almost $40 billion in economic output for Victoria and 8.5 per cent of Victoria's gross state product. There are 360,000 jobs associated with it. That is around 8 per cent of all jobs in Victoria. It is about our third-largest employer, collectively as a sector. 68,600 new workers are anticipated to be needed by 2027, and 162,900 further workers will be needed by 2034. In the short term it remains one of the strongest entry points into the workforce, especially for young people. Around 12,800 apprenticeships and trainees are in construction and growing, namely around carpentry, plumbing, electrical works, bricklaying, civil construction and so much more. We have got 127,370 construction businesses in Victoria and 62.7 per cent of them are sole traders. Across Merri-bek in my community 6500 locals work in construction. That is about 7 per cent of my local community's employment. It is the fourth-biggest employment sector in Merri-bek. In terms of businesses, there are 2500 businesses in construction that make up about 15.5 per cent of local businesses. It is the largest small business sector in my community.

But of course it is going to become even more important as we drive to build more homes for more Victorians through the *Plan for Victoria*, the 60-odd activity centres including Coburg, Brunswick and Sydney Road, which we have recently released final plans for – we want people to be living in good quality homes when it comes to my community and all of our communities – and the homes through the housing statement, the Big Housing Build and so much more. It is Victoria's program of reform that is leading the nation to protect consumers in this regard, because while other states have sought to water down their building controls to catch up to Victoria, which is building and approving the highest number of homes – that is a fact – compared to any other part of the country, we want to make sure that we build these homes well and to a good quality and a high standard. The work of the Building and Plumbing Commission has been essential since we have established it in lifting those standards as well. Of course that is part of our ongoing work to continue to make reforms in this important space.

This bill creates a further number of reforms as well, mainly around providing for the administration and regulation of the building and plumbing industries in the standalone act; the strengthening and enforcement of building legislation and building plumbing standards to provide effective and streamlined disciplinary processes for licensed registered persons in building and plumbing industries;

ensuring effective regulation through the continuation of the building permit levy; and making consequential amendments throughout the bill as well. There are quite a number of provisions, which I will run out of time to go through comprehensively, but again, this is all part of our plan to build more homes of a good quality, a higher standard, while creating more jobs and skills for the construction industry.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (18:29): I am pleased to rise on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, and I do so at a time when we see in the construction sector across Victoria that the rate of insolvency is going up, not down. It is very tough out there for builders to survive, and it is not because of the issues the government claims these measures will address. I will come to those in a moment.

We debate this bill at a time when completions are stagnating in this state and building approvals in this state have only been occurring at the rate they have because the government has been expediting approvals through its development facilitation program and clocking those numbers up as if they are putting roofs over people's heads. We debate this bill at a time when the building and construction sector, particularly the residential construction sector, is struggling to find the workers it needs, and there are critical shortages right across the trades, which we rely upon to see homes delivered to markets so that families and individuals can buy their home and claim their little stake in the Australian dream. It is getting harder. It is taking longer. The delays in government are a blight on the aspirations of this state to deliver on its housing targets, which the government is nowhere near meeting. It is ironic because in the face of those headwinds, which mean that it is taking longer to get homes to market and it is costing more, the government comes into this chamber and it says that this two-volume set will be the solution to the problem. But I say that these measures, for the reasons which have been outlined by the member for Caulfield, our lead speaker, and the speakers on this side since, are actually going to lead to more expensive homes. That means housing affordability will be more distant and not more reachable for Australians, particularly young Victorians. It will take longer, and the building and residential construction sector will actually be smaller than it is now.

With all of those challenges which the sector is facing, which see it getting harder for Victorians to be able to acquire their own home, the government is actually putting more hurdles in the way, and it is hard to understand why. What the member for Caulfield as our lead speaker has pointed out is that it is very reasonable to put to the government that they should consult more, and a number of grounds for that call have been enunciated in the course of this debate. But the ones I want to echo in particular are those that surround the prudential obligations that are going to be imposed on registered builders, because as the Master Builders association points out, the drivers of insolvency are not so much dependent on minimum prudential requirements and liquidity requirements. What is happening is cash flow and access to the workforce that builders need to be able to complete homes on time. Those insolvencies rest in part on government-driven delays in the process of delivering homes to market. I remember, with a number of colleagues, we on this side of the house convened a housing summit in 2023 and we asked the sector what it was that was driving so many insolvencies and seeing consumers hit hard, because ultimately they are the ones we want to benefit from a functioning, sustainable and secure residential construction sector. They said government delays.

I have met numerous builders – too numerous to mention – who explained to me that the costs of delivering homes is made all the more expensive because sometimes it can take years unnecessarily to complete homes and estates, which when you think about just land tax alone will add many millions of dollars, tens of millions in some cases of larger developments, to the prices of houses that builders bring to the market. We think on this side of the house – in fact we strongly believe on this side of the house – that the government is selling Victorians short by rushing headlong into this. It claims it has consulted, but the feedback from stakeholders indicates that is plainly not the case. Such a substantial overhaul of the regulatory framework is something I can understand the government believes can be done just as a matter of ticking a box administratively and ministerially. But what they do not appreciate is what this means out in the real world. As even speakers on the opposite side of the house

have conceded, we have a sector that comprises residential construction firms that are largely small, often sole traders. They are not big operators, but most of them manage to deliver their homes for customers in the way we would expect and see customers be able to go into their homes.

If proceeded with in the manner the government is stubbornly intending to, what these changes will actually see is a huge chunk of the sector just leaving the sector. That is the real risk, because many of these construction firms, most of whom have not been the subject of the complaints these measures are intended to address, are going to have to increase substantially in size so that they can meet the prudential requirements that are going to be imposed on them, again without any real world reference to what these firms have to contend with when they are delivering on the wishes of their customers. You will see the smaller side of the sector withdraw from the sector and abandon it all together. That is the risk. The risk on the other side is that you will see bigger firms dominate the sector even more. And what does that mean? It means that for homebuyers, consumers, it will be far more expensive to purchase their home. There can be no other conclusion. I do not even think the government knows if it is being completely honest with this chamber and the Victorian people about what the regulatory impacts of such a substantial tranche of changes are going to mean for consumers. It has not done that, and nothing I have heard in the debate this afternoon convinces me that the government knows what the extent of these changes is going to visit.

We know that in Victoria it is already more expensive to complete homes compared with other jurisdictions in Australia. Whilst the government can claim that completions this year are higher than other states, when you look at the trend, particularly in Queensland and New South Wales, their rates of completion are actually positive, whereas in Victoria they are stagnant, and we know that we have the lowest number of completions in a decade. That is saying something, because after 12 years, after all of the warning signs this government has received over the years from us and from stakeholders in the sector, it has done nothing substantive to make the construction of homes easier, quicker and less expensive for Victorians. It means that their housing targets are, frankly, a bit of a joke. The housing statement, the economic growth statement, the *Plan for Victoria* statement are all just that – statements, or if you like, extended media releases; there is no real substance in them. Yet they bring a bill like this, which has no bearing to the aspirations in those statements. They talk about very ambitious targets, 80,000 homes a year. I know it tried to walk away from it, but it made the commitment of 80,000 homes a year – 800,000 over the decade to 2034. How can you reconcile those aspirations in each of those three documents alone with what is in here? What is in here will operate as a handbrake for more housing. It will create more risk. It will mean there will not be as many entrants into the market of construction firms, which adds to competition to keep prices more moderate in terms of the growth in construction inflation. It is already high, and we need to think of ways to arrest that increase in construction inflation. But you cannot at the one moment say that these regulations – I have already held this two-volume set up – will mean housing affordability will improve and then expect prices to moderate. They will not. It is already too expensive for most Victorians to buy a home in this state.

I support wholeheartedly the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Caulfield. I just implore the government, just for once, to be reasonable. Understand that what, as a government, you are trying to do is going to add to cost, it is going to constrain supply and it is going to mean residential prices for new stock coming onto the market, particularly for first home buyers, will be more unaffordable – precisely the outcome we do not want in this state.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (18:39): I am delighted to rise today to make my contribution in support of the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. This is another important bill and one that will establish a new principal act for the integrated administration and enforcement of building legislation and the building system and legally establish the Building and Plumbing Commission, BPC, as the successor of the Victorian Building Authority, VBA, with the stronger enforcement necessary to reinforce confidence in the Victorian building system.

These are important changes, and we know the challenges in housing and building at the moment. This is a concern across Victoria and in my electorate of Clarinda. There is a lot happening to combat

these challenges, and this bill forms part of the broader package of reforms to Victoria's regulatory framework for housing and building matters, as outlined in the building statement released by the Minister for Housing and Building in 2025. It builds on other recent legislation, including the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025, the Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025 and the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As we know, this also sits together with the housing statement to increase the amount of housing construction in Victoria and to put consumers at the centre of the building system, strengthen the power of the building regulator and make sure it is easier for consumers to access insurance and resolve disputes. As my colleague on this side the member for Pascoe Vale said, it is all about consumer protection and consumer confidence in the building industry.

Not long ago I was honoured to welcome the minister for housing, who came to my electorate not far from where residential housing was built at the beautiful Development Victoria site in Springvale South to celebrate the completion of the 47 new townhouses at the Coomoora residential development. It is a great project located along Coomoora Road, with the townhouses including a mix of two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom homes, providing a diverse range of housing options for people in Melbourne's growing south-east suburbs. These are fantastic homes with 6.5-star energy ratings, double-glazed windows, induction cooktops and heat pump hot water system services, which means that they will help to minimise running costs as they require less energy to heat and cool. It was really great to meet with the residents and to see them settle into their new homes and to see what Coomoora offers residents outside with access to the dedicated open-space area, which makes up 20 per cent of the site, including landscaping, a park and also existing trees for outdoor recreation. I would like to take this opportunity once again to commend the minister on the development. It has delivered high-quality, affordable and sustainable homes, ensuring more Victorians have a place to call a home of their own. It is fantastic to see families settling into their new homes in Clarinda district, part of the south-east, with easy access to parks, sporting facilities, bushwalking, accessible primary schools and kindergartens. It is also a great community in Springvale South and Noble Park. I was out there doorknocking not long ago and again visiting residents in the area over the weekend, and it is really a great community and one that I am really proud to represent here in this space.

As we heard, we want to continue to support Victorians through challenges in housing and building, but also something that I hear a lot, particularly from my constituents in Springvale South, which has a really significant number of renters, is many of those are looking for their own home and looking at building their own home and want to have access and want to have confidence in this space. In the meantime the government has been working really hard to support renters like those in Clayton South with more than 150 rental reforms coming into effect this week, which will see rental providers and agents required to use a standard form for rental applications. Applicants can also be asked to provide the information listed in the standard application, and it will now be an offence for renters to be charged a fee by rental apps and platforms. These changes came into effect in 2025 and include ensuring rentals meet the minimum standard, banning rental bidding and no-fault eviction, and having more notice for rent increases and notices to vacate.

As you can see, we are working to support all the challenges across housing, and we are here today with the new principal act to provide for administration and enforcement of laws regulating the building and plumbing industry and building and plumbing work. This will deliver on the government's commitment to establish a new regulator that brings together all aspects of building quality control into a single agency by establishing the Building and Plumbing Commission. This is really important for consumers. Again, like the member for Pascoe Vale said, it is all about consumer protection and consumer confidence, which are at the heart of this bill.

We have heard that the single biggest investment most Victorians will make in their lifetime is their home. Whether Victorians are purchasing or renting, they should be able to do so with the confidence that they will be moving into a safe, high-quality and affordable home which is free from costly defects. The government made a commitment to overhaul the building regulator to provide Victorians

with better access to insurance when builds go wrong and to introduce stronger financial protection for apartment owners. This bill delivers the next stage of reform to permanently establish the Building and Plumbing Commission. As mentioned, it is built on reform of the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 and the Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025, which began the process of creating more integrated and effective building regulation. Furthermore, it is also a comprehensive overhaul of the system since the Building Act 1993, which was introduced 30 years ago. The scale of the change to our state since the Building Act was introduced in 1993 is also very important.

These are exciting and important changes that are another way in which the government is supporting Victorians and Victorian families in getting into new quality homes such as the ones I mentioned before in Coomoora. We want more housing – more affordable and more available for everyday Victorians – and we will keep working to make sure that Victorians have the access and confidence in housing that they deserve. I commend the minister for bringing this bill forward, and I commend the bill to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:48): I also rise with the graveyard shift tonight to speak on the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026. It is a pretty substantial bill, and we have heard some wideranging views from both sides of the house about the impact on their local community and broader housing supply. I just want to share a few comments from the Euroa electorate and how I see this – from listening to my community – potentially impacting us. It is being sold as a solution to a broken system, but I think there have been substantial concerns raised today about whether it is making the system and the process harder, rather than providing that greater scrutiny and greater flowthrough of houses on the other end. Because when you increase cost and complexity, you are not fixing housing – you are making the situation a lot worse and you are choking supply.

I was listening to our shadow minister and the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Caulfield, and I think it is a fairly acceptable to ask for more transparency and make sure it is not centralised power, which we have seen. In my communities right across the Euroa electorate – 12,500 square kilometres – I cannot tell you how often a month we hear concerns about housing. Just this week actually I wanted to raise a local matter with a family out of Broadford. They have got a young family, with several children that go to school in Seymour. They have purchased their own property in Avenel. They cannot afford to build. After being tenants for six years – great tenants, never having any issues – her family was given notice to vacate because the landlord is selling. Rising interest rates, insurance, council rates and extreme regulation are forcing small investors out, and this is subsequently reducing our rental supply. She is a property manager and gave me this wonderful insight into her own personal experience, but really you could extrapolate that across thousands of people in my electorate alone. Her family did buy land in Avenel, but the rising costs mean they can no longer afford to build. I think that that is a really concerning place that we are at in Victoria – that what was once a dream for so many is now just unachievable. They did everything right: they put the deposit down on the land, they found a conservative place to rent in the interim while they saved to build, and it is just not stacking up anymore. I think that regional Victoria needs more houses, there is no doubt about it, and we want that process to be streamlined and protected so that at the end you get the product that you have purchased. There are a lot of different ways we can get there, and I think that we have got more concerns in this bill.

I do want to be clear that we do absolutely need reform, no doubt about that, because there are so many failures in the system. We have seen the consequences of poor oversight and how many lives and livelihoods and people's connections to communities are destroyed when they lose that place of residence. The family I referred to in Broadford are having to contemplate pulling their children out of school. They are contemplating where they can afford to live, and it is no longer that safety net where you choose to be around your family and the community. And I have got to say, for regional Victoria to have a waitlist of 50 people applying for a rental property shows how much this is a crisis.

We would think it was competitive to have three or four, genuinely, in communities that might only have less than five rental properties available on the market. We are seeing it is dog-eat-dog to try and get a home in this state. Then subsequently when you can afford to build something there are defective buildings, combustible cladding as we have heard throughout the week, and consumers are so exposed. No doubt we do acknowledge that Victorians deserve better, they need better. But this is not careful reform. It is rushed, it is unbalanced – this is an extraordinary amount of legislation that is going to impact the lives of just about every Victorian and every builder in Victoria. These are not just big operators. Most in our communities are mum-and-dad businesses. They are the construction workers that you bring out to do extensions and builds. These are not massive operators. I just think that, as has been raised today on our side of the house, we are concerned that it can do more harm than good.

The bill is restructuring the entire regulatory system. It is replacing the Victorian Building Authority with a new Building and Plumbing Commission, centralising significant power into a single regulator, and there are those expanding enforcement powers and penalties and introduction of tougher financial requirements on builders and new levies. On paper it sounds like the Labor government are trying to strengthen the system, but in reality they are increasing pressure on an industry under extraordinary strain as it is. I heard the member for Hawthorn making some really intelligent comments around a permit not being a home – you cannot live in a permit. So a lot of these housing statements that are being announced are really just press releases. There is not a lot of substance. They are permits that are coming through, and we are not seeing houses at the other end, certainly not in my electorate.

Before I go into some of the detail of the legislation, I wanted to highlight that in my community of the Euroa electorate in Benalla, we have got Benalla West. It is a housing development that has been years and years and years delayed. It is taking an awful amount of time. In total – I just want to get these figures right – we have 48 new homes being built and about 21 that were demolished to build the exact same amount of bedrooms. They are demolishing a huge portion of our government housing to build the exact same amount. There is no increase in supply, but they are displacing many families in doing that. I think something is not right. You have got to be a bit practical in how we get to providing homes for Victorians. I think we need to see, one, our government and social housing maintained. A lot of people just want a safe, comfortable roof over their head – it changes the trajectory of their life – but we are displacing people. One constituent wanted to raise their family in Benalla, and their options were not Benalla, because it was going to take years. Their options were Bendigo and Ballarat. I know that we have criticised this government for not knowing regional Victoria, but boy, there is a big difference between Benalla, Bendigo and Ballarat. You do not have those connections and the family relationships or the school of your choice. It is forcing people to live where they do not necessarily want to.

This bill is concentrating more power in a system that is already struggling to carry it. It is sweeping authority into a single body, and the safeguards are certainly uncertain. You do not make housing more affordable by making it more expensive to build. The industry estimates this bill could increase construction costs by up to 30 per cent. We already have the trajectory of the fuel increase. This is outrageous. What was once this idea, the aspiration, to own your own home and raise your family, suddenly, is a rebellious idea. People are not even aspiring to it; they cannot imagine they will ever be in a position to own their own home. What has happened to Victoria? The Labor government. Those costs, all of this red tape and regulation, get passed on to the consumer. It gets passed on to Victorians – to buyers, to families and to renters. Fewer builds mean fewer homes.

I feel silly making such a simple contribution this evening, but I feel like we are speaking to legislators that are not listening to our community. Drive out towards the north-east – there are suburbs in areas that could provide affordable housing for Victorians. Give them an area where they can raise their children and go to a school of their choice. Allow them to go to a community where there are health services and mental health services. Give them the opportunity to have a life that is well connected to public transport. We have just forgotten what our values are in Victoria. We have been speaking about the cost overruns on the Big Build sites, the state-sponsored strippers and the government turning a

blind eye to $15 billion of cost overruns; imagine how many homes we could have built with that. On this side of the house we want transparency, but importantly, we want houses for regional Victorians.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:58): I am pleased to have a very short amount of time to make what will be, hopefully, a very short and sharp contribution. I understand the Prime Minister is making a national address in a minute or two, so I will make sure that I make this very short and sharp before we adjourn. The Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026, as others have mentioned, particularly from this side of the house, goes to providing for those additional powers and that additional enforcement that are going to mean that building and the regulation of building in this state are improved. I was just having a good conversation with the member for Tarneit about these matters in his electorate. He was also making some reflections on the South Australian election and the losing of the Sheffield Shield. I do know that what I think we do very well in this state, other than the results in the cricket, is making sure that we are providing for a better, stronger system of building. The enforcement agency that will be in place as a result of this legislation goes to so many of those issues that have been raised within our community over a significant period of time. I want to acknowledge everyone that has played a really important role in making this bill come to fruition. It will do important work that goes to the importance of community safety and the importance of making sure we do the right thing. I commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Traralgon bypass

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:00): (1619) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to progress the planning and ultimately construction of the proposed Traralgon bypass. I have directed this to the minister for roads, but I am not entirely sure whether it is the minister for roads or the Minister for Transport Infrastructure; previously it has been the minister for roads, given it is still in the planning stages. But whoever it is for, this is a project that has been hanging around like a bad smell for over 35 years, and it is becoming more and more important. My federal colleague Darren Chester, who is also campaigning for the Traralgon bypass, and I have always said we would get the Traralgon to Sale duplication finished. We had a three-year hiatus when there was no funding from the state Labor government, despite there being federal money on the table, but it is finally done, although I have got issues with the state of the road and how bad it is, despite it being a brand new stretch of road; that is a separate issue. Traralgon to Sale is now done. It is time to get on with the Traralgon bypass, and I know my colleague the member for Morwell is keen as well. Literally at Farm World on the weekend – the member for Narracan and I were both there – I had people come up to me and ask where it is at. People actually do treat it as a bit of a joke now, because it has been planned – I can remember as a schoolkid people talking about planning for the Traralgon bypass, and I am pretty old; in fact tomorrow I am even older, because it is my birthday. But this has been going for a long time, and we need to get on with it.

The previous answers I have got – and I notice on the Transport Victoria website it still refers to needing to get the Loy Yang mine rehabilitation sorted out before we do anything more. That is an excuse, because that was not an issue in 2017 when the government put up $1.4 million for planning when we knew that there was going to have to be rehabilitation at the Loy Yang mine. There are going to be issues with the Loy Yang mine, because the bypass will need to go relatively close to it, but it is not a reason to stop. There is only really one way the Traralgon bypass can go, and that is to the south of Traralgon, between the town and the mine. I know Latrobe City Council are also seeking some clarity because they have got a development as well that they want progress on, but there are something

like – I am just trying to do a calculation; it depends on where you start and stop – about a dozen sets of traffic lights now in Traralgon. For anyone east of town, including Sale, Rosedale and Loch Sport in my electorate, that part of the world and further east into the member for Gippsland East's electorate, it is becoming a massive drain. It is a very, very slow process and very frustrating to get through all those traffic lights. Indeed the people of Traralgon I am sure would welcome the bypass, because their town is now clogged up with trucks and traffic that is going through. The government needs to get on with it. We need to complete the planning and then work with the federal government to actually fund it. I ask the minister to do so.

See Yup Temple

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (19:03): (1620) My adjournment is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The action I seek is for the minister to join me to visit the See Yup Temple in South Melbourne, an important landmark of deep cultural, historical and community significance within our state. Established in 1866, the See Yup Temple is the oldest Chinese temple in Australia. It was founded by migrants from the See Yup district and has long served as both a place of worship and a community hub – a place of gathering, support and cultural continuity for generations. In 2024 the See Yup Society of Melbourne received $60,000 from the Allan Labor government to restore the temple after a fire earlier that year that caused significant damage to the main building. Today the temple remains an active and vibrant site maintained with great care by dedicated volunteers and community leaders. I take this opportunity to invite the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to visit the See Yup Temple. Such a visit would provide a valuable opportunity to engage directly with the community to better understand its history and ongoing contributions and to reaffirm the government's commitment to preserving and promoting Victoria's rich multicultural heritage.

Mornington electorate homelessness

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (19:04): (1621) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing and Building. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on any crisis accommodation they plan to build on the peninsula and support they are giving for the 11 residents at risk of homelessness after the impending closure of the Mornington Peninsula's crisis accommodation centre the Ranch. The Ranch in Mornington has provided crisis accommodation for vulnerable locals for years, through the long-term temporary donation of the site and the work of Mornington Community Support Centre and many others. It is operated without government funding and now is set to close on 17 April for redevelopment. That means 11 people who have already experienced homelessness are staring down the possibility of ending up back in their cars, in tents, on the foreshore or elsewhere, amongst the hundreds of others already in that situation on the peninsula. There is nowhere obvious for these people to go. Ranch 2.0, the replacement crisis accommodation model set up by Mornington Community Support Centre on the peninsula, consists of just seven units and is already full. When the Ranch closes, the peninsula will lose a critical safety net in a community already under enormous pressure.

On any given night, the shire says that there are more than 100 people sleeping rough on the foreshore and in reserves. Now the Mornington Peninsula has more people sleeping rough than any other Victorian local government area. The latest data in January 2026 show that there were 138 people sleeping rough in tents, cars and foreshore reserves. This is happening in a region with approximately 1300 existing public housing dwellings but over 2600 people on the applicant waiting list. That is part of the 65,000 across Victoria who are on the waiting list for public housing and the more than 30,000 people who are on the priority waiting list. That is simply not good enough. We need more and more investment on the peninsula in public housing, crisis accommodation and more. We need more support for our community support centres like the peninsula's three independently-funded support centres: the Community Support Frankston, which I note the member for Frankston looks after; Mornington Community Support Centre; Southern Peninsula Community Support and so many others. These centres are doing such great work but are feeling more and more pressure day by day, and locals are in effect being told to make do with less. This government's response has simply not

matched the scale of need on the ground. These are not just numbers. These are people with names, histories and nowhere else to go. The minister must do something to ensure that the Mornington Peninsula is not left with grossly inadequate crisis accommodation in the middle of a homelessness crisis. We need investment and we need investment now.

Frankston electorate ministerial visit

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (19:07): (1622) My matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit some sites at Frankston. At the moment we have got substantial investment in the Frankston & District Basketball Association redevelopment, which I was very proud to have a look at the other day and see how that progress is going, and I know the minister would love to see that. We have also got Bruce Park, which is the home for netballers, cricketers, Auskick, AFL and tennis, and they are looking at a redevelopment at the moment too. We have got the potential for a redevelopment down at Baxter Park as well. Frankston council have put that on their advocacy list, and it is a fairly big ask. We have got, I think, the amazing Frankston Archery Club, of which I am a member. We have got the hockey potentially as part of the sport there. We have got AFL, soccer and cricket as well. It would be a major redevelopment – they will need a master plan. I know they would love to speak to the minister and show the minister around that site as well.

Gippsland train services

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:08): (1623) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister take immediate action to fix the capacity and timetabling issues on the Gippsland line and in my communities across Narracan. Deputy Speaker, if you can indulge me, I would like to read an email sent to me by Andrea, one of my local constituents:

> I am a nurse at Warragul hospital.
>
> For myself to start a shift at 7:00am I can not get a train to Warragul as it skips the stop and it would require me to drive to Drouin or Garfield when you consider the extra 5–10 min of my driving it's not worth my effort.
>
> It is a similar situation for our son that attends school in Warragul at CCG so he is driven there to be able to have the extra rest and also so he is not having to loiter around Warragul for an hour or more in Warragul before school starts he however does catch the train home.

It is one thing to announce free public transport, but it is another thing not to have the infrastructure to support that announcement.

Quite frankly, on the Gippsland line it does not matter whether you get on the train at Bairnsdale or you get on the train at Southern Cross. If you get on the train at Southern Cross station, you get to Richmond and the train is full. It is standing room only. The fact of the matter is we are meant to have six carriages. We only have three. That is not enough for regional Victorians to go to work in Melbourne and get home, having to stand the whole way. The one thing this government has failed to do, especially in regional Victoria, is address the public transport issues. But it is typical of this government. They make an announcement. They only think about the city or the outer suburbs. They do not think about the consequences in regional Victoria – and regional Victorians spend more on fuel than city people, because we have longer distances to travel. What I am saying is: if you are going to make the announcement, have the infrastructure to back it up. That is what needs to happen.

The fact of the matter is it is the same across everything in my electorate, whether it is a hospital that still has not been delivered, sporting facilities that are never even considered or roads that are in rack and ruin, and now it is the public transport system. I have written to the minister time and time again about the public transport issues in my electorate. My constituents have had a gutful of it. I have had a gutful of it, and I would like some answers and some action on the public transport issues in Narracan.

Clayton South Primary School

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:11): (1624) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the upgrade and modernisation of Clayton South Primary School. This is a very exciting project for our community. It was great to be out there onsite before Christmas and to catch up with the principal Craig Pauwels, students and the construction team and to see the great progress that is happening at Clayton South Primary School. I am really looking forward to watching the site transform and to visiting again when it opens its doors. It is a huge investment in education in Clayton South, with $12.45 million for a new administration and learning building, a new teaching building consisting of a general-purpose classroom, a science space, a new playground and landscaping. It means that students at Clayton South Primary School will have an even better place to learn, grow and thrive. This building will serve generations to come, so congratulations to everyone involved, again. I am looking forward to returning to see our young people and staff using the building for the first time.

There are so many fantastic schools in the Clarinda district, and there is a lot happening there. We are investing in upgrading schools across the state, including Clayton South Primary School. We are also investing in really important cost-of-living measures for school families – more than 10,000 free pairs of glasses for Victorian students who need it most, more than 65 million free meals under the school breakfast club program, and so much more. There has been a lot happening in our school and education settings for families to have access to the best facilities supporting kids to do their best in classrooms. I thank the minister, and I am looking forward to his response.

Cardross Primary School

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:13): (1625) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is to build the Cardross Primary School a new toilet block. The condition of the current toilet block at Cardross Primary School is very old, dilapidated and in vital need of an update, as it currently fails to meet the basic requirements of students. I have a letter from the school council vice-president Sherrin Madden, who has also written to the minister as a matter of urgency to get this rectified. Sherrin said:

> Our toilet block currently has a number of regulations which are not met as stipulated in the Building Quality Standards handbook, May 2025. This includes ventilation, doors and partitions, lack of privacy, open urinal and insufficient staff toilets.

In 2025 Cardross Primary School did get an accessibility grant in order to support a student with mobility needs. That resulted in the removal of a staff toilet to construct an accessible facility, which was obviously much needed, for the student, but that has resulted in leaving the primary school with only one staff toilet for currently 20 staff. The other toilet that staff can use is the old accessible one, which was not upgraded and is not up to code. They are constantly spending money on repairs and maintenance, and they are a very, very small rural school. It is unsustainable for them, and they are unable to absorb all of those expenses. In 2025 Cardross Primary School budgeted $22,000 for building works but ended up spending 124 per cent over that budget just in maintaining current buildings.

The impact on students is increasingly concerning, as you could well imagine. A number of students are reluctant or fearful to use the current toilets, with some deliberately avoiding using the toilet throughout the day. I can understand parents' frustration, because that would concern me also as a mother. That creates serious health risks. The condition of these facilities is directly compromising students' health, dignity and the right to a safe and inclusive environment. I call on the minister to take immediate action and replace, upgrade and give Cardross Primary School their toilet block. This is the absolute bare minimum that the Department of Education should be supplying – the literal bare minimum of a student's right to hygienic toilet facilities.

Bellarine electorate community safety

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:16): (1626) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to provide an update on how the recently established violence reduction unit is supporting the Bellarine and the wider Geelong community. Last month I joined my Geelong regional colleagues, the member for Geelong and the member for Lara, and the member for Mordialloc, who was actually there as the Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change, to co-host a violence reduction unit forum at the Murran hub in Geelong. We brought together community organisations, service providers and local leaders from the region and surrounding areas to hear directly about what the VR unit's role is and how a collaborative and health-led approach is going to help stop violence before it starts. At the forum there was a strong First Nations lens underpinning that discussion, acknowledging the over-representation of First Nations people in the justice system in our local area. The forum highlighted the importance of culturally informed, community-led solutions that reflect that local knowledge and lived experience. What stood out clearly, though, was the importance of taking a health-led approach to violence and understanding and addressing the underlying causes rather than simply responding after harm has occurred. This approach recognises that mental health, education, housing, community and connections play a role in prevention. Working together across these areas, we can better support our young people and our families and build stronger and safer communities. I would like to thank all the organisations and community representatives who attended that forum with such constructive discussions. I look forward to hearing from the Premier and sharing this update with the Bellarine community.

Prahran electorate planning

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (19:18): (1627) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Planning, regarding planning application PA2604170 at 674 High Street in Prahran. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with affected local residents before any final decision is made on this development. A significant number of Prahran residents are deeply concerned about this fast-tracked proposal for a six-storey, 50-unit social housing development. Let me be clear: there is strong community support for the delivery of social housing – absolutely – but that support is contingent on developments being delivered in a way that respects planning controls, neighbourhood character and genuine community consultation. In this case, residents feel the balance has not been achieved. The proposal has bypassed local council oversight and removed residents' rights to appeal through VCAT. This has left the community feeling shut out of a process that will have a direct effect and lasting impact on their homes and the amenity around them.

There are serious concerns about the scale of the development. It exceeds the expected height and intensity of the residential growth zone and directly abuts single-storey homes without an appropriate transition. Residents are particularly worried about overshadowing impacts on private open space and existing solar infrastructure. Traffic and access issues remain unsolved, and the development proposes just five car spots for a 50-home dwelling – yes, five – with all access via a narrow one-way street called Florence Street. This raises clear safety risks and will place further pressure on an already constrained local road network. Waste management is another unresolved issue. With no onsite loading bay, waste collection and deliveries will occur from the street, increasing congestion and safety risks for residents.

Residents were notified late and have limited opportunity to engage, despite the scale of the proposal and the removal of formal appeal rights. These residents are not asking for the project to be abandoned, they are simply asking to be heard and considered. The minister must meet with them directly to listen to their concerns, to restore confidence in the planning process and to ensure that any outcome reflects both the needs of social housing and the legitimate expectations of our local community.

Pascoe Vale electorate community safety

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:20): (1628) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety and Minister for Victims, and the action I seek is for the

minister to provide my community with an update on how the investments, initiatives and reforms of the Victorian Labor government are progressing to help prevent crime and make the suburbs of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West safer for all.

Everyone deserves and has the right to feel and be safe in their homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities. That is why as a Victorian Labor government we have continued to take meaningful and tough action on crime and the root causes of crime, including via the appointment of Mike Bush as the new Victoria Police commissioner; stronger bail laws to crack down on violent, dangerous and serious repeat offending; implementing serious consequences and time for violent crime; life sentences for youth gang recruiters; introducing the nation's first ban on machetes and other measures to take dangerous weapons off our streets; tougher laws to crack down on organised crime, illicit tobacco and posting and boasting; protecting retail staff; and more flexible deployment of PSOs through transport and shopping precincts. We have established the new violence reduction unit; youth crime early intervention programs, including community safety and social workers in schools programs; stronger anti-vilification laws to crack down on hate speech; new family violence prevention laws to protect women and children; and ongoing action on the root causes of crime via housing, education, health, wellbeing, mental health, youth engagement, cost of living and much more. We have delivered dedicated local crime prevention initiatives, including 179 extra police officers locally since 2015 and 21 additional family violence specialist police, and we have launched dedicated local operations Operation Priority and Operation Bluestone to target crime and community safety in Central Coburg, Pentridge, Newlands and North Coburg. We have got the new activity centre plan, which is all about revitalising Central Coburg and Victoria Street Mall, including a $153,000 recent investment to refurbish and improve safety, ambience and amenity at Victoria Street Mall.

These real measures and real actions are making a difference. As of December 2025 we have continued to drive down crime and offence rates across our community, with a 5.2 per cent decrease in the offence rate overall compared to the previous 12 months, a 4.1 per cent decrease in the number of offences, a 9.9 per cent decrease in crimes against the person, an 8.1 per cent decrease in assault and related offences, an 11.5 per cent decrease in stalking, harassment and threatening behaviours, a 10.2 per cent decrease in sexual offences, a 4.1 per cent decrease in property and deception offences, an 18.5 per cent decrease in property damage, a 17.1 per cent decrease in burglaries and break-ins, a 9 per cent decrease in drug offences, a 17.6 per cent decrease in public order and security offences, a 17.8 per cent decrease in weapons and explosives offences, a 23 per cent decrease in public nuisance offences and a 12.5 per cent decrease in disorderly and offensive conduct.

But of course, notwithstanding this progress, there is more to do. That is why I was pleased to have hosted a community safety roundtable with the Premier in North Coburg on 11 February, where we heard from a range of locals around the impact of crime on them and their neighbours and community. We heard from Sophie and Emilio from the Coburg Greek church, Sara Murdock of Pharmacy 777, local young mum Lyal, Rania and Caspar from the Coburg Traders Association, local dad Alex, Geraldine from the Pentridge precinct, longtime local Paul Gavin, Anna-Maria about her elderly mother in Pascoe Vale South, longtime resident Francine, local principal Maria, Vince on the place-based approach we are adopting in Coburg, Anna about women's safety and so many others.

Responses

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (19:23): Members tonight raised a number of matters for various ministers, and they will be dutifully referred.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:24 pm.