



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Thursday 19 June 2025

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 March 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

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

CONTENTS

PETITIONS	
Age of criminal responsibility	2457
Gender services.....	2457
COVID-19 vaccination	2457
PAPERS	
Department of Health.....	2458
Victorian Government Response to the Community Visitors Annual Report 2023–24.....	2458
Department of Premier and Cabinet	2458
Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2024.....	2458
COMMITTEES	
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	2458
Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria	2458
PAPERS	
Papers.....	2461
COMMITTEES	
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	2462
Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Services.....	2462
PETITIONS	
Responses	2462
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Payroll tax.....	2462
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices	2462
Adjournment	2462
MOTIONS	
Middle East conflict	2462
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Coldstream Community Centre	2463
Motor neurone disease	2463
Box Hill multicultural harmony festival.....	2463
Uganda the Pearl of Africa Victoria Association	2463
Blind box collectables	2463
James ‘Jimmy’ Mentor	2464
James ‘Jimmy’ Mentor	2464
St George Coptic Orthodox Church	2464
Vietnamese Museum Australia	2464
Africa Day	2464
Calabria Club	2465
Yoorrook Justice Commission	2465
Yoorrook Justice Commission	2465
Joy Leggo	2465
Aunty Geraldine Atkinson AO	2465
Motor neurone disease	2466
Living Libraries infrastructure program	2466
Rural and regional women.....	2466
Middle East conflict	2467
Energy policy	2467
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	2467
BILLS	
State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025	2468
Second reading.....	2468
Committee.....	2470
MOTIONS	
Budget papers 2025–26	2478
BILLS	
Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025.....	2478
Budget papers 2025–26	2478
Second reading.....	2478
ANNOUNCEMENTS	

CONTENTS

Parliamentary officer.....	2482
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Suburban Rail Loop	2482
MyCentre.....	2483
Ministers statements: housing	2485
Firearms regulation.....	2485
Latrobe Health Assembly	2485
Ministers statements: National Corrections Day.....	2486
Multicultural seniors support program	2487
Latin America trade and investment	2487
Ministers statements: apprentices and trainees	2489
Water policy	2489
Gendered violence	2490
Ministers statements: Refugee Week	2490
Written responses	2491
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Eastern Victoria Region	2491
Western Victoria Region	2492
Northern Victoria Region	2492
Southern Metropolitan Region	2492
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	2493
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	2493
Northern Metropolitan Region	2493
Eastern Victoria Region	2493
Western Victoria Region	2494
Southern Metropolitan Region	2494
Northern Victoria Region	2494
Northern Victoria Region	2494
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	2495
Western Victoria Region	2495
Northern Victoria Region	2495
Western Metropolitan Region	2495
BILLS	
Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025	2496
Budget papers 2025–26	2496
Second reading.....	2496
Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025	2499
Second reading.....	2499
Committee.....	2501
Third reading.....	2516
State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025	2516
Assembly's amendments	2516
Committee.....	2517
Third reading.....	2517
Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025	2518
Second reading.....	2518
Third reading.....	2524
MOTIONS	
Budget papers 2025–26	2525
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Written responses	2531
BILLS	
Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	2531
Introduction and first reading	2531
Statement of compatibility.....	2532
Second reading.....	2538
Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	2540
Introduction and first reading	2540
Statement of compatibility.....	2541
Second reading.....	2542
Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025	2543
Introduction and first reading	2543
Statement of compatibility.....	2544

CONTENTS

Second reading	2549
ADJOURNMENT	
Industry policy	2552
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund	2553
Professional engineers legislation	2553
Gisborne Aquatic Centre	2554
Omeo Highway	2555
Jumps racing	2555
Youth Fest	2556
Hepatitis	2556
Pacific Island Playgroup	2557
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region sporting and recreational facilities	2557
San Remo foreshore reserve	2558
LGBTIQA+ equality	2558
Bus route 476	2559
Upfield and Craigieburn rail lines	2560
Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo	2560
Responses	2561

Thursday 19 June 2025

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Petitions

Age of criminal responsibility

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 87 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the dangers posed by the doli incapax rule, which assumes children aged 10 to 13 do not understand their actions are seriously wrong. This legal gap allows child-on-child abuse cases to go unpunished, leaving victims unprotected. Without reform, young offenders avoid accountability, increasing the risk of repeat offences. Immediate action is needed to protect vulnerable children and ensure justice is served. Measures are essential to protect vulnerable children and prevent further harm in our communities.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently reform the doli incapax rule to ensure that children aged 10 to 13 who commit serious offences such as sexual abuse, are held accountable for their actions by lowering the age of responsibility for serious crimes, introducing mandatory rehabilitation programmes for young offenders, and providing mandatory, free counselling for all victims of child sexual abuse.

Gender services

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 3797 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that Victoria practices a condemned model of care to address childhood gender dysphoria with no reports of the model being abandoned. The affirmation model in Victoria is based on the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS) affirmation model for addressing childhood gender dysphoria. The model was considered as one of the benchmarks of care by many but others questioned this model. To resolve this issue, an independent review of gender identity services for children and young people was commissioned in 2020 by NHS England and NHS Improvement and led by Dr Hilary Cass, a retired consultant paediatrician and former President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in the United Kingdom. The final report was published on 10 April 2024. The report has condemned the affirmation model, highlighting the lack of evidence to justify its use. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to halt gender affirmation practices in Victoria.

COVID-19 vaccination

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 3367 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need for decision-makers to reconsider the current vaccine mandates imposed on not only healthcare workers but all workers in Victoria. With the state of emergency declared over, it is time to reassess whether these strict measures are still warranted for not only healthcare workers but all workers in Victoria. High vaccination rates and acquired immunity have significantly decreased risk levels. According to data from the Department of Health, as of February 2022, over 90 per cent of Victorians aged 16 and above have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. This high level of immunity should be taken into account when evaluating the necessity and effectiveness of current mandates. At present, the operational Ambulance Victoria paramedics are voicing their concerns through messages on the ambulance vehicles, expressing their concerns for their health and wellbeing, and stating they are essentially 'burning out'. The vaccine directions are directly contributing to the staff shortage issue and impacting the quality and safety of the public across the state within all industries. A review should be undertaken with an open mind toward getting our Victorian healthcare employees and all Victorian workers back to work to avoid further compromising public safety or individual rights. The review should diligently consider the current risk versus benefit of keeping the vaccine instructions in place for Victoria and conclude that the mandates for COVID-19 and flu vaccines are no longer required for all Victorian workers. A state directive should be issued, effective immediately, to all Victorian employers to offer all Victorian citizens who had their employment terminated because they did not comply with vaccine mandates, to be reinstated into the positions they held before their termination. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to review the current vaccine mandate directions in place, cease the COVID-19 and flu vaccine directions; effectively immediately and issue a state directive

to enable Victorian employers to reinstate employees who had their employment terminated due to non-compliance with vaccine mandates.

Papers

Department of Health

Victorian Government Response to the Community Visitors Annual Report 2023–24

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That the *Victorian Government Response to the Community Visitors Annual Report 2023–24* be tabled.

Motion agreed to.

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2024

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2024* and domain 1 to 6 data tables and the 2024 Closing the Gap tables be tabled.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:36): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report on the inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria, including an appendix, extracts of proceedings and minority reports, from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Georgie PURCELL: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

In undertaking this inquiry the committee recognised the economic and social impact of the cultural and creative industries, and particularly the performing and visual arts, on the lives of Victorians. In doing so, the committee accepts that it has defined the cultural and creative industries quite narrowly and freely accepts that there are many industries that could be defined as cultural or creative. However, the committee has chosen to limit the scope of the inquiry for strictly practical purposes and to make the inquiry more manageable given the committee's inquiry schedule. The scope of the inquiry's consideration covered a wide range of issues, including the funding and investment in the cultural and creative industries across governments; access and participation in region and rural areas was a focus; the representation and the role of public broadcasters the ABC and the SBS; workforce development and industry sustainability; and sector recovery from the COVID pandemic and future resilience.

The committee is grateful to the arts organisations, industry representatives, regional communities and public sector agencies as well as individuals who took the time to make a submission to the inquiry and to appear before the committee in public hearings. In addition to thanking those who made such a valuable contribution to the committee's work, I would like to express my appreciation for the collegiate and positive approach taken to the inquiry by committee members at most times. Committee

members may have come to the subject matter from different places but were at all times respectful, added different perspectives and conducted the inquiry in a highly professional manner.

As always I would really like to thank the committee secretariat of Michael Baker, the committee manager; Jessica Summers, the inquiry officer; Alyssa Topy, the research assistant; Caitlin Connally, the inquiry officer; Julie Barnes, the senior administrative officer; and Sylvette Bassy, the administrative officer, for the professional and thorough assistance that they have given to the committee throughout the inquiry and always give to us as the committee. I would also like to thank Matilda Dunn, the committee's intern, for her excellent background research work on this topic and this inquiry. The committee has greatly appreciated the support.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (09:39): I rise to speak on the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee report into cultural and creative industries in Victoria. I thank my colleague David Davis for getting up this motion in the first place. I thank the chair Georgie Purcell for the way in which she carried herself in this inquiry and also the staff, including Michael Baker and the secretariat staff. It was a thorough, decent and thoughtful inquiry. I think everyone came to the inquiry with a mindset of how important our arts and creative industries are to Victoria – the contribution our arts and creative industries make. We know from the inquiry that particularly regional Victoria is not getting its fair share of the revived national arts policy. Certainly there is a lot more work to do to advocate to the Commonwealth government for Victoria's fair share of creative industries funding.

I would note, just looking at some of the extracts, the committee supported continued advocacy on the ABC and the SBS, particularly a return for a Victorian-based 7.30 report, something I am quite passionate about. I was very surprised to see the Labor members of the committee oppose that. Also, given the motion yesterday, I was very surprised to see Labor members of the committee opposing the SBS being located in somewhere like Broadmeadows or Dandenong. I think we all support the SBS, as we heard yesterday. It is important to note those votes in the chamber that Labor members would oppose that. Why would Labor members oppose the ABC bringing back the Victorian-based 7.30 report when it is important for integrity in Victoria and to scrutinise both governments and oppositions here in this state.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (09:41): I will also open my contribution by thanking the committee secretariat as usual for their incredible hard work. I also want to thank all of the incredibly hardworking creative organisations that took time to come and provide information to the committee that allowed a really thorough examination of the value that the arts and creative industries bring to Victoria. That was never in question throughout this inquiry. I think what we delved into was what we then do to recognise and support that contribution to continue to grow into the future.

On the topic that we spent some time discussing yesterday, it is good that the chamber has had an opportunity to talk about the value that the ABC and the SBS bring to the national conversation. It is really good to reiterate that that is much appreciated. My view is that those independent media organisations provide a great public service to us in progressing national conversations, and I think the committee was at its strongest when it recognised and confined its advocacy to getting a better share. I think it is really important that we always reiterate the independence of those institutions and the need to protect them from political interference in their operational matters. But the chamber had an opportunity to discuss those matters yesterday around a greater presence for the SBS in multicultural communities in Victoria, and the committee was glad to ventilate that issue.

Returning to the main issue that we heard from creative organisations, the need for funding and certainty around funding, on that note I think the committee has made some recommendations. The Victorian Greens have put in a minority report suggesting that extra measures that Victoria could explore would be a living wage for artists pilot program; some assistance to access affordable insurance, particularly for the live music and events industries; and of course a big uptick in small to medium organisation funding, which is sorely needed.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:43): I also want to join in comment on the cultural and creative industries in Victoria report by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. I want to thank the committee staff for their work. I want to thank the chair, and I also want to say that in many respects the committee did come to some very sensible bipartisan conclusions. There is also, importantly, a minority report which the Liberals and Nationals have put to this. It is a stronger call for more resources in Victoria, a stronger call-out for the interference in the ABC and the SBS that has occurred in driving the staffing and the head office locations into western Sydney. This is not a decision made by those organisations; it is a decision made by the Commonwealth Labor government, which has interfered in these organisations' independence and forced them to move to western Sydney. It is an absolute outrage that the two government-funded national broadcasters are both based in Sydney and are both overwhelmingly now concentrated in western Sydney. Melbourne has been short-changed. If anyone wants to go and check this, they can look at page 63 of the report, and there is a stark table, 4.1, which breaks down the staffing: 51.9 per cent of staff costs are expended in New South Wales; in Victoria, 17.5 per cent of staff costs. These are stark differences that relate to hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers money which is siphoned out of Victoria and funded now into western Sydney. It is about jobs, it is about our creative industries, it is about artists and it is about the reflection of Australia to Australians. It cannot be done from western Sydney. It is a scandal, and somebody needs to really fight on this.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (09:45): I was honoured to be part of this inquiry. I have always absolutely enjoyed the cultural and arts scene. I grew up in community theatre and I worked at the ABC for a number of years. But it was wonderful to be with different political parties around the table. I do enjoy that part of Parliament, so I appreciate colleagues on that committee and the secretariat, who provided so much support with submissions and scheduling the public hearings. I do want to thank those that attended the public hearings. We had Bendigo Theatre Company come down as well as Arena Theatre and Leah Sertori. They made a very valuable contribution to the inquiry.

Culture and arts are just so important in regional areas. We have so many great festivals. Even our historical museums are part of that scene. Our RSLs are involved, our showgrounds committees – there are just so many aspects of the arts and culture that are reflected in regional communities. It does, as an industry, contribute \$30 billion and employs 300,000 people directly. I think some of the stories that were shared during the hearings were so important, including the impact of the COVID lockdowns and hearing about one young person who had a very vibrant, outgoing personality and then over the course of the lockdowns they gradually saw them really become a very different person, very insulated and disconnected from society – and we heard that time and time again. It was important having people living in regional areas sharing those stories. We saw that there are thousands of employees employed in Sydney for the ABC and SBS, and I think having a spread is so important, because just like MPs, you need to live in your region – or you should – because that is when you know your community and you can represent them. I think the same goes for our public broadcasters. I encourage everyone to look at the report, and hopefully from this we will see a much fairer share of funding coming to regional areas.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:48): I also rise to speak on the report tabled today in regard to cultural and creative arts industries. It was a very illuminating inquiry. I also wish to thank all those people who came to give evidence in the inquiry, because obviously going to an inquiry and giving up your time, energy and effort to represent the organisations you are from but also talk about the challenges that impact you is no mean feat. I want to thank those people who came to give their evidence so the committee could consider it. In regard to the national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, both those organisations, and particularly the ABC, came under significant attack from the conservative Morrison government. There is a litany of stories in the press about how the ABC has been used as a political football and how its funding has been absolutely throttled. So for those opposite to talk about the fact that the Labor government is making sure that the organisation somehow has to put all of its staff in western Sydney I find a little bit rich, to be perfectly honest. One thing I do know is that organisations like the ABC and the SBS have a very important role in telling stories about

multicultural communities, but also organisations like National Indigenous Television, which also tells important stories about Indigenous people all over Australia. So there are a lot of cultural organisations that tell important stories about all manner of people – also stories about our LGBTIQ+ communities. I for one am pretty sure that the ABC, the SBS and TV stations like NITV do a fantastic job every day telling stories, whether it is about regional Victorians or suburban Victorians or any Australian people all around the world. Telling an organisation what it should do in regard to operational matters was something that was very disappointing, but it is something that comes from those opposite all the time. That people should uproot their lives and somehow move to another state I thought was rather ridiculous.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:50): I also rise to speak on the cultural and creative industries in Victoria inquiry. I am grateful to have attended some of those sessions and had some small involvement in it. One of the conclusions I took away from it is that, with no ill intent, and through events of COVID and lockdowns and things, we in Victoria have perhaps been a little bit complacent about the health and value of our creative industries. Because they have always been so strong, I think there has been a temptation to assume they always will be strong. I look around at the community groups, the cultural groups, the creative groups in my electorate. All of them struggle now for volunteers. In most cases they are still struggling to get back to the numbers of participation. And at the end of the day, the arts are about participation. Art is participatory, whether you are the creator or the audience of it. The one lesson in and the indirect value of this report is to refocus our attention on what the arts do to uplift us, to help all of us, whatever our perspectives, to find the greater part of ourselves, to inspire us to be better, and we should not take that for granted in Melbourne. Whatever the magic was that allowed Victoria and Melbourne in particular to become a cultural heart of Australia, whatever that alchemy was, we cannot take it for granted. That alchemy will not just renew itself, and while we are probably amongst the least creative people in the state, it is our job here to make sure that we provide the environment in which it can not just functionally but enthusiastically.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General –

HealthShare Victoria Procurement, June 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Results of 2024 Audits: TAFEs and Universities, June 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission –

Report to the Minister for Police, 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022, under section 70O of the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004.

Report to the Minister for Police, 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022, under section 174B of the Firearms Act 1996 (*Ordered to be published*).

Integrity Oversight Victoria, Annual Plan 2025–26 (*Ordered to be published*).

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Electricity Safety (Electric Line Clearance) Interim Regulations 2025 (*Gazette S313, 18 June 2025*).

Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 – Victorian Government report on Multicultural Affairs, 2023–24.

Parliamentary Budget Office – Operational Plan 2025–26: Priorities and protocols.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 46, 47 and 49.

The Queen Elizabeth Centre (QEC) – Report, 2023–24.

*Committees***Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Services*

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into local government funding and services.

*Petitions***Responses**

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Planning's response to petitions titled 'Environment effects statement for the decommissioning of oil and gas at Barry Beach marine terminal'.

*Production of documents***Payroll tax**

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 18 June 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 28 May 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to the payroll tax for general practitioners and other health professionals. The letter states that the date for the production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

*Business of the house***Notices**

Notices of motion given.

Adjournment

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (10:04): I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 29 July 2025.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:04): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) as of 11 June 2025, there have been 55,104 reported casualties across Gaza;
 - (b) shooting at people trying to reach food supplies, including at the militarised distribution points, continues to be reported;
 - (c) as of 11 June 2025, Gaza Ministry of Health reported that hospitals have received 224 people killed and over 1858 people injured from the areas newly designated for food distributions;
 - (d) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East Commissioner-General Mr Philippe Lazzarini has called for aid deliveries and distribution to be 'at scale and safe';
- (2) does not support the State of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza; and
- (3) supports calls for sanctions and an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Coldstream Community Centre**

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (10:05): It was such a joy to head back to the Coldstream Community Centre to celebrate completion of a really significant upgrade delivered under the climate-resilient buildings program and the Growing Suburbs Fund allocations, and this has been part of a \$3 million upgrade to make sure that the building is sustainable, accessible and energy efficient. To see a solar battery, the additional insulation upgrades, accessible car park improvements and entry ramp, as well as upgrades to the main entrance, bathrooms and kitchen, is a real delight. I know that the U3A photography club and friendship group have really benefited from this work, and I want to congratulate everybody involved.

Motor neurone disease

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (10:06): I want to give a huge shout-out to everybody who has been part of the MND Big Freeze this year. Right throughout the state, including across Eastern Victoria and right down to the Parliament, people have lent their time and steeled their nerves to plunge into icy water in the name of a really important cause. This is about making sure we can continue to raise funds to assist in research to find cures and better treatment for the beast MND, which affects so many people every year and takes the lives and independence of people. We want to also make sure we are supporting our dear friend and colleague in the other place Emma Vulin, who has been a champion for so much progress and fundraising and for improving awareness of MND.

Box Hill multicultural harmony festival

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:07): It was my great pleasure to attend Harmony Day at the Box Hill town hall last weekend, and I thank the Chinese professionals association and the City of Whitehorse for running an excellent event. It was a wonderful opportunity to come together and celebrate many cultures that make up our local community. Harmony Day is more than just about words; it is about connecting through food, dance, shared stories and in this case an excellent display of garden-grown vegetables from the Chinese community – fantastic. I learned a lot. I was honoured to be part of the event and to witness the community spirit on full display.

Uganda the Pearl of Africa Victoria Association

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:08): It was also a real pleasure to join the Uganda the Pearl of Africa Victoria Association again for another evening filled with music, culture and wisdom. And I say the Ugandan community have the best sense of humour of any group; I have more laughs at that event than any other I go to. They are a fantastic group. These are real celebrations where they get to share their culture with their community. They are an incredibly inclusive group with genuine love for Australia, but they also make sure that all other African Australian groups come along and share as well, and they are tremendously welcoming. Thank you to the organisation and the Ugandan High Commissioner, who attended. I really look forward to the next event.

Blind box collectables

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:08): Labubu fever has swept the world. People are lining up for hours hoping to get their hands on the \$32 Labubu that they want. But it is not just the queues of people that they are having to beat to get their hands on this little furry key chain; they have to win the Labubu lottery, because Labubus are gacha, they are blind boxes. They are part of a system where you do not know what you are going to get until after you buy and open it. So instead of buying one, maybe you buy two or three, increasing your chances of securing the design that you want. It kind of sounds like gambling, because it is gambling. I am not hating on Labubus

here, let me get that clear, but blind box collectables, gacha games and loot boxes, which we see too often in video gaming, are becoming increasingly popular among young people. And it is obvious why – because gambling is designed to be addictive. For the companies it is extremely profitable. Young people are living in a world where gambling is so normalised they are seeing gambling ads every day. The major parties are still receiving huge donations from these gambling companies, and as a consequence they are too afraid to really crack down on what is a predatory industry. Young people are experiencing the effects of gambling addiction before they have even graduated from primary school. We need to act.

James ‘Jimmy’ Mentor

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (10:10): I rise to offer my condolences and acknowledge the life of James Mentor, better known to many of us as Jimmy. Jimmy was well known for his commitment and lifelong devotion to two great faiths we shared: the Australian Labor Party and the Collingwood Football Club. He was a cherished mate and loyal companion to many. He was always willing to share the wealth of experience gained from his time working in the offices of Senator Ciccone, Senator Jacinta Collins, the Victorian government and the Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools. Since his untimely demise on the King’s Birthday holiday obituaries have flowed in from organisations and individuals far and wide. This is not only a testament to his incredible work but also to him being a top bloke who was always willing to help and support anyone who needed it. Jimmy’s commitment to working people and his belief in the strength of collective action guided his approach to a life spent in the service of others. He will forever be remembered for his warmth and cheerful attitude and his fondness for banter over a chilled beer. My deepest condolences to Jimmy’s family, loved ones and former colleagues, in particular Senator Ciccone, and all who are feeling the weight of his loss. He will be sorely missed, but his spirit will continue to live on in our hearts. Vale, James.

James ‘Jimmy’ Mentor

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:11): I too would like to take the opportunity to note the passing of Jimmy Mentor, who I had a bit to do with through my student politics days. I always found him to be a great bloke, and I would like to pass on my condolences to his family and the broader labour movement on his loss.

St George Coptic Orthodox Church

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:12): It was wonderful to attend St George Coptic Orthodox Church and parish annual Good Shepherd gala dinner with my colleague Moira Deeming in St Albans over the weekend. I want to thank Father Thomas Abdelmalek, Father Morkos Yassa, Father Peter Agaibi, Father Samuel Elias, Father Anthony Mikhail and Father Moussa Morcos for their warm welcome. It was terrific to catch up with so many friends.

Vietnamese Museum Australia

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:12): I also enjoyed attending the Vietnamese Museum Australia gala dinner for Refugee Week, celebrating 50 years of Vietnamese settlement, with my colleague in the western suburbs Trung Luu. We also heard a powerful keynote speech by Dai Le, the independent member for Fowler. I want to congratulate the incredible Tammy Nguyen for organising the event.

Africa Day

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:12): It was great to take part in the 2025 Africa Day gala dinner last month with my colleagues Brad Battin, Renee Heath and Ann-Marie Hermans. I want to thank Qiniso Dube, president, and Fred Alale, treasurer, of Africa Day Australia.

Calabria Club

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:13): I had a wonderful time at the Calabria Club Bulla for their Sagra della Soppressata event. We had delicious pizza, pasta and sausages, and we celebrated with many Italian families across Greenvale and surrounds. My late Nonna and Nonno were long-time members of this club, and I was pleased to bring my son Teddy to take in the Italian culture.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:13): Last week I had the absolute privilege to join Travis Lovett, proud Kerrupmara/Gunditjmara man and Yoorrook Justice Commission deputy chair and commissioner, for a part of his 500-kilometre journey from Portland to Parliament in support of truth-telling and the important work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. He was joined along the way by community, where truths were shared by First Nations people as well as non-First Nations people. We listened to each other and to the country we walked upon. During the walk I heard from a descendant of Alfred Deakin who has uncovered a truth that all of us in this place need to hear. Deakin was a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly before he became Prime Minister, and during a late-night session at the end of a year he was instrumental in rushing through laws that set the path to enable the stolen generation. The legislation passed with little scrutiny or fanfare, yet it would have shattering consequences for First Peoples culture, kinship, identity and human rights which continue today. We continue to see laws rushed through this Parliament that have deeply harmful impacts on First People: there have been several in my short time in this place. In opening up the truth the Yoorrook Justice Commission has placed upon us in here a responsibility to acknowledge that and honour it, not just in words but in the actions we take when we vote in here.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (10:14): I rise to acknowledge the powerful and deeply moving Walk for Truth. Part of the important work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, this extraordinary walk began in Portland on 25 May and concluded at Parliament House yesterday. Led by the Yoorrook deputy chair commissioner Travis Lovett, a proud Gunditjmara man, this 25-day journey through places deep with cultural and historical significance included visits to communities such as Warnambool and Colac. In Geelong hundreds of people walked by his side at Transvaal Square to St Helens boat ramp last week. The Walk for Truth gave communities across western Victoria the opportunity to share stories, listen, learn and walk together towards justice. It is a reminder of the deep strength and ongoing contributions of our First Nations people and celebrates the oldest living culture in the world. I pay tribute to everyone who supported the Walk for Truth – elders, community members and allies alike. May we honour the spirit of truth-telling as together we walk towards a better future for our First Peoples and for all Victorians.

Joy Leggo

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (10:15): On another matter, I would like to acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary contribution of Joy Leggo OAM as she steps into a well-earned retirement. As the CEO of Cultura, Geelong's leading multicultural organisation representing over 80 different nationalities, Joy has led with vision, compassion and unwavering dedication. Throughout her career Joy has steered the organisation through times of change and uncertainty, always ensuring delivery of exceptional services to the wider community. Thank you, Joy, and I wish you a very happy and well-earned retirement.

Aunty Geraldine Atkinson AO

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (10:16): I rise to pay tribute to Aunty Geraldine Atkinson, who was inducted as an Officer of the Order of Australia in the King's Birthday awards. Aunty Geri is a proud Bangerang and Wiradjuri woman. She is a member of the Atkinson-Bamblett family, which has been so instrumental in progressing education for Aboriginal people in our state. Together with

her sister Mary and her brother Alf she has carried on this tradition. Aunty Geri has a long list of achievements, and I will name just a few. She has been president of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated since 1999, she is a former board member of the Goulburn Ovens TAFE, she is an inaugural chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation, she was the inaugural co-chair of the First People's Assembly of Victoria, she holds an honorary doctorate for outstanding contribution to Indigenous education from Deakin University, she was awarded the Lynne Kosky Memorial Award for Lifetime Achievement in Education in 2020, she is a member of the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll and a member of the Victorian women's honour roll. Aunty Geri is someone who I am very proud to call my friend, who has made a huge difference to the lives of Indigenous people in our region.

Motor neurone disease

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:18): On Monday I took the dunk in the ice water out in the grounds of Parliament for the FightMND cause for Emma Vulin of the other place. It was cold, it was uncomfortable, but what was a little bit disappointing was I was the only person from this chamber, and I think I was the only actual crossbencher other than the Greens from the other place. So my plan for next year, presuming we do this, is I am going to put the bite on everyone – looking at you, President – to join me, not necessarily at the same time, but in the cold water, because this MND thing is not pleasant. As unpleasant as it was for me, what people like Emma are going through is far, far worse.

Living Libraries infrastructure program

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:19): I rise today to celebrate the Allan Labor government's ongoing investment in our public libraries, which are the beating hearts of our communities. Under the 2024–25 Living Libraries infrastructure program more than \$4 million will go towards upgrading and expanding 19 libraries across Victoria. This is not just an investment in buildings, it is an investment in equity, lifelong learning and social connection. From Bayswater to Ballarat, from Wodonga to Bulleen, communities across our state will benefit from modern, inclusive and functional spaces that support free access to information, digital technology and community-led activities. On Monday I joined the Minister for Local Government Nick Staikos, a fierce advocate for libraries, to celebrate a \$1 million investment in Croydon library, a transformative project that will include a black box theatre, multipurpose rooms and a co-working space for community services. This new landmark facility will not only strengthen local learning but foster creativity, social cohesion and civic participation. Over the last decade Labor have invested over \$53 million in 158 library infrastructure projects, reaffirming our commitment to public services that uplift every Victorian regardless of postcode. This government knows that libraries are more than just shelves of books: they are safe, welcoming and inclusive places where people of all ages can gather, connect and grow. I look forward to seeing these projects come to life and continuing the important work of building a fairer and more inclusive Victoria.

Rural and regional women

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:20): One of the pleasures and privileges of being in this job is listening to inspirational women from the regions. Across Victoria's regions women are raising urgent concerns about the challenges facing their communities, from bushfire management to mental health, education and coastal livelihoods. The message is clear: rural and regional Victoria is being ignored by this government. Emergency services are under strain, with declining CFA morale due to ingrained Labor disrespect and insufficient investment in bushfire preparedness. Farmers are battling the worst drought in decades, yet support remains overwhelmingly inaccessible and ill-suited to real-world needs. Mental health services are critically lacking, particularly in youth, and there are little to no services in our rural towns. Rising school refusal rates are of growing concern, as are the ever-increasing needs of domestic violence victims for support. Education is another flashpoint: teacher shortages and oversized classrooms are forcing students to leave towns for senior schooling, often

never to return. Infrastructure and public assets sit idle while red tape blocks local solutions. Meanwhile, coastal communities face infrastructure closures and reduced fisheries support, and reasonable requests from the community fall on deaf ears. Women are not just asking for handouts, they are demanding practical community-led solutions. I thank them for their inspiration, and we will continue to advocate for their issues.

Middle East conflict

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:22): My thoughts today are with the women, men and children of Iran and with the women, men and children also of Israel, and we cannot also forget those countries in between, so we are talking of course of Saudi Arabia, of Iraq, of Lebanon and the neighbouring countries. I had the good fortune of living in Jordan for some time, and so to them go my thoughts also, because at this time, minute by minute, hour by hour, missiles are flying in both directions. I only hope that none of them find their way into that country. It is bad enough for those civil populations that they are going through what is an awful torment. It will scar generations to come. It will result in untold death and destruction of those civilian populations. If there is anything I have learned in my time overseas it is that almost all people are sensational people. They all want what we want: they want their families to be safe and they want their children to grow up and have a happy, successful, healthy life. That so many families are being destroyed – so many innocent people that have nothing to do with this and have no malice in their heart – is a tragedy for all of us. My thoughts are with them all.

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:23): I want to again draw the chamber's attention to the significant statements of Mr Mark Richards, who is the secretary of the Mining and Energy Union Victoria. He has belled the cat on Labor's chaotic and incompetent energy policy. Mr Richards said in his statement on LinkedIn yesterday that worker safety is at risk. He said Labor has pushed forward with the Yallourn power station scheduled shutdown in mid-2028. He pointed to deteriorating equipment and claimed maintenance cutbacks are 'all driven by political pressure'. He went further and said Labor's 'promised offshore wind generation, new transmission networks, and ... battery storage projects are just that, promises.' Whether you agree with Mr Richards or not, he is a significant player; he is a significant union official in this sector. He went on to say:

Budget blowouts and Victorian funding cuts make it increasingly unlikely that replacement energy infrastructure will be operational before Yallourn shuts down.

That is in 2028. He said:

Energy shortfalls are inevitable if the Government does not act.

He went further and he said:

... Energy Minister D'Ambrosio needs to answer for what happens if Yallourn Power Station is needed past mid-2028 but cannot operate due to a lack of maintenance plan past the Government's 2028 closure date.

He has made these statements in good faith, and I invite people to go and read them on his LinkedIn. I think that the government should engage with Mr Richards and actually make sure that Victoria is not left in a terrible position.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:25): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (10:26): Thank you for those earlier contributions on this bill on Tuesday and for the opportunity to sum up before the committee stage. This bill delivers several key items from the 2025–26 budget and amends several state taxation laws to support fair and effective revenue management for everyone in Victoria. Importantly, this bill delivers no new taxes. Despite what some have said, this is at least a revenue-neutral or even revenue-negative tax bill.

The bill seeks to extend the eligibility period for the temporary off-the-plan stamp duty concession for purchases of apartments and townhouses for a further 12 months; that will bring it to 21 October 2026. That was announced in the budget and has been well received, because it is an initiative that is proving quite popular and getting more people into more homes.

Importantly the bill introduces a provision to enable victim-survivors of family violence to access tax relief. Currently victim-survivors of family violence are unable to access a land-tax exemption when they leave their principal place of residence due to family violence and are unable to access first home buyer benefits to assist them to purchase a new home if they have previously had an interest in a property. The bill provides these concessions for the first time in legislation to victim-survivors, who we know can sometimes experience an inherent disadvantage when trying to re-establish their lives after that experience. It is my intention and hope that these measures will offer some level of assistance and relief during the monumental task and the bravery of fleeing a home and finding a new one.

The government is committed to ensuring that renters can access long-term housing, and the bill makes some changes to the build-to-rent (BTR) development provisions. The government wants these developments to offer long-term alternative housing options to home ownership for Victorians. To reflect this commitment the bill clarifies the intention that a genuine lease term offer of three years must be offered to a renter and requires the build-to-rent provider and renter to jointly sign a declaration if the renter elects to take out a lease term shorter than three years. The bill also gives the commissioner of state revenue the power to not impose a higher tax rate during a period of build-to-rent development that is temporarily vacant or uninhabitable, such as during a renovation.

There are also some other changes in the bill that expand the vacant land conservation covenants account criteria, amend the commercial and industrial property tax settings, amend the definition of ‘regional employees’ under the Payroll Tax Act 2007 and amend the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to introduce a 50 per cent penalty tax for recklessness by a taxpayer. I certainly acknowledge the State Revenue Office (SRO) in relation to many of these amendments, because they are brought about by their experience and requests of government.

There has been a lot of engagement on this bill, and I thank members from a range of parties for their engagement. There will be a number of amendments which have been canvassed by previous speakers, but I will just address the house amendment from the government in the first instance and, in doing so, ask that that be circulated.

Amendment circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Jaclyn SYMES: This amendment will remove the current proposal in the bill to insert a minimum lease length of 12 months for BTR properties. Instead the amendment allows – importantly, I just do want to put this on record – but it does not require the Treasurer to set a minimum lease length in regulations of up to 12 months. I have made the decision to not set a minimum lease length at present

but acknowledge that there are some views in relation to the appropriate settings in this regard. I have given a commitment to the property industry in particular for further consultation to ensure we are achieving the policy goals of the BTR tax concessions. This is a tax policy that has only been in place for two years, so I do want to ensure that, if we make any changes, there are no unintended consequences. Again, it is the original policy intention to enable more opportunity for long-term leases, and I do not want anything to undermine that objective.

The opposition have two amendments, the first of which they have had significant engagement with government on, and I thank them for that. We agree with the policy merit of allowing people more time to rebuild their damaged or destroyed home following a natural disaster without incurring land tax. This is something that is generally dealt with through exemptions and is custom and practice, but putting it into legislation to reflect what ordinarily happens is a good idea. This amendment will extend the maximum period a person can claim an exemption from land tax when their home is uninhabitable due to natural disaster, from two years with no evidence required to four years with the same settings. The commissioner of state revenue can grant an additional two-year exemption if they are satisfied there is evidence the property is still uninhabitable. I do thank the opposition for their collaboration on this amendment. It has got to a point where everyone is happy to agree to that, it is my understanding.

The second opposition amendment has the effect of knocking back the 50 per cent recklessness penalty tax provision. This is again informed by advice from the SRO. Importantly, a penalty tax is an enforcement measure that deters noncompliance. If people comply with their tax obligation, penalty tax obviously does not apply. The change encourages people to comply in the same way that other legislation includes penalties for noncompliance. As I said, this is informed by the SRO's experience. Those that are attempting to paint it as a new tax measure would be incorrect to do so. And in doing so, this brings about more effective legislation based on those that are dealing with these matters each and every day. So I do not support the opposition's attempt to disagree with the SRO in this matter.

The Greens have got some amendments, and I know we can deal with this a little bit in committee, but just in summary, the first one is in relation to stamp duty concession caps of \$1.6 million. On first glance of the policy, I shared the concerns that the Greens have. I do appreciate that there is policy merit behind not offering tax concessions to high-end, premium apartments. However, the feedback I have received from industry – and again, this is a very new scheme – is that developers can rely on the higher value dwellings being sold first to enable them to secure finance to ensure that further dwellings, or the more affordable apartments in a complex, can then come online and be made available. The advice is that without that, you might have the high-end purchasers buying ready-made or previously built, and therefore you would not get the benefit of more homes being built by virtue of that. But it is something I am very happy to keep an eye on and continue to get feedback on. I just think it is a bit premature, given I am told that it might stymie development, and the whole point of this policy is to build more homes. I am more than happy to have that conversation in committee, but that is pretty much the reason I am not in a position to accept that amendment today.

The second amendment restricts the rental increases that can be imposed during a fixed-term lease. The advice I have is that there could be unintended consequences with this amendment, as it could encourage developers to push renters into shorter term leases to enable rent increases between tenancies. The government is therefore not supporting the amendment on this basis.

In conclusion, I do thank many members for the engagement. I acknowledge the conversations and consultation that have also occurred with the property industry, particularly on the build-to-rent stamp duty aspects of the bill. I do believe that this is a balanced bill that delivers tax concessions for those that will benefit either from an extension of the existing policy or the introduction of a new setting, and it also fixes up and catches some of those fringe cases that fall outside existing legislation, as informed by the SRO. I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.*Committee***Clause 1 (10:36)**

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you, Treasurer, for your explanation earlier, but I would just like to understand a bit more regarding the extension of the stamp duty concession for buying off the plan. Because it is progressively applied, those buying homes for over \$2 million will effectively receive a higher rate of tax concession than those buying more affordable homes. What is the policy justification for giving a proportionately higher tax break to those most wealthy people over people who are struggling to buy an affordable home? You mentioned that it is needed to stimulate demand – that the building industry feels it is necessary – but our understanding is that a lot of these higher end properties would sell anyway, regardless of the tax concession. I guess I am wanting to understand how that can be justified on a policy basis and what evidence you are relying on to continue that.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is fair to say there is not a lot of evidence either way. Although the policy is almost 12 months old, because you do not receive the benefit until completion, the data is not necessarily there, so I can really only go on what people are telling me. I share your concerns. This is about ensuring more homes and making it more affordable for people to enter them. That is the policy objective. But we have not at this point in time delivered any caps because we want it to be available for all. The main reason that I am not yet convinced to bring in a cap is the advice that, particularly in apartment complexes, the penthouses, for example, off the plan can be sold, and that generates the ability for further investment and the ability to get finance to complete the project. So the advice is that if you remove that stamp duty concession it may have a negative impact on new development. Yes, it is effectively a windfall for people who can afford homes, and I accept that there are some challenges on a policy basis to feel comfortable about that, but when I am advised that it will then generate more affordable apartments being built as a consequence, that is what we are weighing up at the moment.

Not only will the extension for another 12 months be a good policy outcome for people entering the market, it will give us more data to inform us where it lands. I take your point, your view, and some would say that these purchases would be made in any event. I am advised that perhaps that is not the case. I do not know. We need to just keep an eye on this. But am I uncomfortable with generous tax concessions for people that can afford it? Yes. The benefit that more people can get into homes – that is where I am keeping a close eye on it. I will continue to consult with industry and continue to consult with people that are buying. We will get some advice off the experience of people buying off the plan.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I thank the Treasurer for that response and appreciate that you have shared that you have some concerns about this policy but are willing to see how it goes for another 12 months. I guess we are in a situation in this state where we have a significant amount of debt, and we have this approach where we are providing tax concessions to people who quite likely do not necessarily need them as an incentive to buy a home, although you admit there may be some – that needs to be tested a bit longer. I would have thought that, given the financial situation we are in and the need to ensure that we are spending our money as prudently as possible, you would want a bit more certainty before having a policy that allows these tax concessions to go to people who potentially do not need them.

Jaclyn SYMES: I will go into a little bit more detail on the industry advice that I have. I understand the points you are making, but I would offset that with the policy priorities – the priority in general of government is to build more homes. We know that, if not the number one issue that people are talking about at the moment – there is cost of living as well – housing is what people in Victoria are asking the government to focus on, and this is just one of our levers in relation to bringing more homes online. Most developments rely on bank finance to proceed, which is generally only available if 50 to 80 per cent of the total value of the development is sold off the plan. That means selling some higher value dwellings early increases the chances that the overall development will proceed, including those lower cost dwellings.

Again, I repeat that imposing a cap could stop the duty concession from acting as an incentive for those anchor purchasers to buy off the plan, which reduces the chances of the development proceeding. Industry also advises that higher value dwellings are sold at a higher per-square-metre price, which helps cross-subsidise the rest of the development. We are going to keep an eye on it, but if it is producing more homes and producing more affordable homes, I am willing to give it another 12 months.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I think we will probably just have to disagree on whether we feel this is an appropriate policy setting. I guess just further to your point about keeping an eye on it, how do you intend to do that?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am just going to continue to consult with industry. When the advice is that developments cannot proceed unless they have those early purchases, that is some of the information I want to test.

David DAVIS: I do not want to labour this point. The changes with respect to trusts in this bill, what impact will they have on somebody whose principal private residence may be in the form of a trust, may be held by a trust – a beneficial trust, a discretionary trust of some type, that holds for somebody their principal private place of residence?

Jaclyn SYMES: In the briefing that I had, which followed the opposition briefing, I was informed that there were members of the opposition that were questioning the changes here. I can only reiterate the advice that there is no impact, they just affect the trustee and when they need to notify the State Revenue Office (SRO). I think there was a quite a bit of conversation with my office and the department about concerns about changes that are not happening.

David DAVIS: So there is no change in the status. Just then on the current status, land tax is leviable on a trust which is held for somebody, by its nature, and it is their principal place of residence. Is that correct, currently?

Jaclyn SYMES: They are really just about notification, the changes, Mr Davis. The issue that we are trying to fix, or the issue that we believe the amendment fixes, is that where land is held by a landowner in their own right, general land tax rates apply; where land is held in trust, a higher trust surcharge may apply. For the commissioner to apply the correct land tax, trustees are required to notify the commissioner when they acquire or dispose of trust land. The current notification requirements, however, are unclear in capturing certain trust-related scenarios where the legal ownership of the trust land does not change. So if you are part of the trustee and have a land ownership and then it transfers to you as an owner, it actually has not changed your relationship with the land; it is just the notification of the arrangements that need to be made. My advice from the SRO is that they are technical amendments to enable the commissioner to assess the land at the correct rate.

David DAVIS: So if the land is owned in a trust now and it was transferred to the individual ownership, personal ownership, that would be required under the new rules to be notified, but land tax would be payable currently under the arrangement where it is held by a trust and perhaps at a higher rate. But if it is transferred to an individual person, then land tax, presuming that is still their principal private residence, would not be payable. Am I reading that correctly, with the notification requirement?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, the application of these changes is only anticipated to apply to situations where you are the trustee transferring it to yourself. Principal place of residence exemptions are unchanged, and you can apply for principal place of residence exemption if you are the owner if it is your principal place of residence. I have got a couple of scenarios that I might give you and they might make it clearer. There are two parts to the amendment. The first part clarifies the requirement for trustees to notify the commissioner where a trustee holds the land for one trust and the land is transferred to a different trust to be held by the same person as trustee, as I explained. The current notification requirements do not clearly capture this type of scenario, hence the commissioner is not

always notified of these events. For example, Ms Green holds property as trustee of ABC unit trust and transfers the property to herself as trustee for DEF unit trust. Ms Green must notify the commissioner within one month.

The second part reduces the scope of the current requirement for trustees to notify the commissioner when they dispose of trust land. As separate requirements apply – that an acquiring trustee or third party must notify the commissioner of a change in legal ownership of the land – it is unnecessary to impose a requirement that disposing trustees must notify the commissioner of the disposal of trust land to an acquiring trustee or third party. The amendment makes it clear that rather than trustees notifying the commissioner when they dispose of the trust land, the commissioner must be notified if the trustee of the land disposes of the land directly to themselves to be held in any capacity other than a trustee of the trust, as there is no change in legal ownership of the trust land. For example, Ms Blue as trustee holds a property on trust for ABC unit trust that is assessed on the trust surcharge rate. The property is transferred from the trust to Ms Blue in her own right and should be assessed at the general rate. Ms Blue must notify the commissioner within one month.

David DAVIS: I move:

1. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**

Clause 1, page 3, lines 2 to 5, omit “to introduce a new rate of penalty tax for recklessness by a taxpayer or their agent as to the operation of a taxation law or their obligations under certain taxation laws”.

This is the matter of the penalty tax that is in this bill, which we oppose. We see that there are already ample powers for the SRO – investigatory powers and powers to fine at 25 per cent and 75 per cent – and this adds a new device, a new penalty. As the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop called it the other day, it is a new cudgel to clobber taxpayers.

Ryan Batchelor: She did not say that.

David DAVIS: Yes, she did.

Ryan Batchelor: You said that.

David DAVIS: No, she did. Well, she said the word ‘cudgel’ across the chamber. Under this new provision, which I was talking about, she leaned over towards me and said ‘cudgel’.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: No, she did. That was her word. It was not my word. I think it is an appropriate word. I thought it was very apt and very succinct in its description, as a new device to beat –

A member: A spade.

David DAVIS: Be it a spade or a cudgel to clobber taxpayers, with more power for the SRO, and taxpayers in the land are wilting as the pressure comes on in a range of directions from all the various increases in stamp duty and other taxes, land taxes and so forth. It has got to be seen in the context of this surge in tax that has occurred, and now this is a new device brought through in this bill. We seek through the suggested amendment to oppose this particular new change.

Jaclyn SYMES: We do not support this amendment, because what we are doing is wanting to ensure that the commissioner can appropriately respond proportionately to noncompliance across a range of situations and respond to that in relation to its severity. A middle penalty rate of 50 per cent for recklessness provides more flexibility, enabling more tailored and better compliance outcomes. The advice from the SRO is that the threshold for the 75 per cent is too high and therefore does not particularly get used and the 25 per cent standard is not in itself considered adequate to change behaviour. I would note that this is about responding to noncompliance. It is effectively responding to people who are not following the law. It is literally responding to what is happening – it is not widespread – out there. It is an enforcement measure that we hope deters noncompliance. Again, if people did comply with their tax obligations, then a penalty tax would not apply. This will encourage

people to comply in the same way that other legislation includes penalties for noncompliance. I think it is incumbent upon us as legislators to make sure that we have appropriate settings to deal with the behaviour that we are trying to discourage. I do not think the opposition are supportive of the conduct, and they expect that there should be consequences. The advice from the SRO is clearly that the current framework does not adequately respond to the behaviour and that these changes will, so we cannot support the amendment.

Georgie PURCELL: I just want to note that all of my questions relate to the new exemptions for people affected by family violence. First off, will the SRO's guidelines be made publicly available before the provisions commence?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Purcell, it is kind of a trick question because they already exist, the guidelines. As you might appreciate, a lot of this already happens in practice through ex gratia and exemptions. Based on the application or things being brought to the attention of the SRO, they can deal with these matters. This is more just formalising it in legislation to reflect what is available already.

Georgie PURCELL: How will the SRO ensure that the process for applying for an exemption is as clear and simple as possible so as to reduce the administrative burden on people affected by family violence?

Jaclyn SYMES: Reflecting on the definition of 'family violence' in the first instance, we do refer to the same definition as in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, referring to behaviour by a person towards a family member where that behaviour is abusive, threatening, coercive or controlling or in some other way presents a risk to safety. It also includes where a child hears, sees or is otherwise exposed to such behaviour. I know you are familiar with the definitions that we apply. In relation to the evidentiary burden, it is anticipated to be quite low. This is about supporting victim-survivors as best as possible – it is the whole purpose. The new system will actually reduce the administrative burden, because you will not need to come back with an application each year like you might have to with ex gratias.

Georgie PURCELL: Treasurer, will the SRO consult or has the SRO consulted with family violence services such as Safe and Equal, Domestic Violence Victoria or Women's Legal Service in developing guidelines?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, Ms Purcell, this is existing practice being formalised. The provisions are about ensuring that people can access first home buyer benefits or the first home owner grant and buyer scheme amendments under there as well. The provisions apply when persons can establish that they have fled a home due to family violence against them or another family member and that they have not and will not receive any financial benefit from the home. This is in relation to who can benefit from this. As I said, we do not want to make that any more difficult for anybody else. The guidelines have been in existence for some time, and I have not received advice from any of those bodies that they have any issues with the current guidelines. However, we will always work with victim-survivors to make sure that the process is straightforward and as simple as possible. Because this is formalising a process that currently exists, it will be a good opportunity for us to talk to people with lived experience of accessing it to make sure that it is as simple, straightforward and trauma informed as possible.

Georgie PURCELL: My next question is somewhat answered, but just leading into a trauma-informed approach: how will this be done or how is it currently done – for example, limiting how many times evidence must be submitted or how many times survivors must explain the circumstances that they are in?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is a good question. The changes are designed to help victim-survivors in the most common situations in which they ask for access. We have live examples, and the SRO has experience in relation to the barriers that people have faced and they are what we are trying to remove. We expect perhaps because it is formalised and more people are accessing it, it will give us an opportunity to have greater data, greater conversations. It is designed to be easy; it is designed to be

straightforward. You would appreciate there is a level of evidentiary requirements, but that is not prescribed for that very reason – it can be some court documents or a police document or stat dec. It will depend on each case, but it is the policy intention. I will ask for regular updates on how it is going to reflect the very issues that you raised, because that is what everyone wants to achieve out of this.

Georgie PURCELL: Lastly, Treasurer, has the government considered the creation of a broader hardships clause within Victoria's taxation acts, as currently exists in Queensland, New South Wales and the ACT?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am always open to ideas, Ms Purcell. For the purposes of today's legislation we have changes in relation to family violence, but there are a range of hardship clauses or hardship provisions already available. Some of them are formalised; some of them are more in the ex gratia exemption space where people can apply. You would appreciate that there are so many different situations. I receive a lot that come to me. I then send it to the SRO for advice, and there are a range of situations that you could never create a law to anticipate. If you have genuine hardship issues, there is always an opportunity for that to be considered in a range of measures in terms of accessing benefits such as first home buyer grants, but also when you have got issues in complying with some of your obligations, such as land tax and the like – those types of things. There is a whole unit within SRO that looks at these issues, and it is also something that my office is across.

Council divided on suggested amendment:

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

Noes (20): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Suggested amendment negated.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 (11:10)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

1. Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –

Clause 6, lines 4 and 5, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

‘For section 21AA(1)(c) of the **Duties Act 2000** substitute –

“(c) either –

- (i) the contract for the purchase of the dutiable property is entered into on or after 21 October 2024 and before 21 October 2025; or
- (ii) the contract for the purchase of the dutiable property is entered into on or after 21 October 2025 and before 21 October 2026 and the dutiable value of the dutiable property is not more than \$1 600 000.”.

This amendment is straightforward. It applies a cap on the off-the-plan stamp duty concessions at \$1.6 million. This is around three times the median new apartment price. We think this better targets the concession to apply to those buying more affordable apartments, including those wanting to purchase bigger family homes, and we also believe this is what the government has claimed that the concessions are intending to do. There is no luxury apartment housing crisis. These luxury apartments have been a part of the market that has consistently been strong without any government assistance. We think people purchasing these properties with prices exceeding \$20 million are willing and able to pay full stamp duty, and Victoria currently cannot afford to forgo the revenue for no policy benefit.

We also believe that additional revenue accrued from this amendment could be redirected into housing programs where there is the biggest need, such as reducing the priority waiting times for those trying to escape family violence. This is where we should be directing housing assistance. I commend these amendments to the house.

Jaclyn SYMES: We have had some conversation about this. We will not be supporting the Greens amendment. I have indicated that there is a need to keep an eye on this indeed, but I would disagree with Dr Mansfield's assessment that there is no policy benefit. The policy benefit is producing more affordable homes because we are encouraging the building of more homes. We will continue to have conversations about these settings, I have no doubt.

David DAVIS: The Liberals and Nationals also will not support these amendments. I understand what Dr Mansfield is trying to achieve with this. But it will affect the aggregate capacity to bring forward projects, and in that sense we will not support this.

Council divided on suggested amendment:

Ayes (6): Katherine Copsey, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Noes (30): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Suggested amendment negatived.

Clause agreed to; clauses 7 to 16 agreed to.

Suggested new clause (11:15)

David DAVIS: I move:

2. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**
Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 16 –

'16A Exemption continues if land becomes unfit for occupation

In section 58(2) of the **Land Tax Act 2005**, for "second" substitute "fourth".

This is a new proposed clause, a suggested amendment that we would insert for the protection of those who have land that is uninhabitable and unusable. This would put in place an arrangement where there is flooding and other natural disasters so that people would not be paying taxes on unusable property for the period. It is a very reasonable proposition. I am thankful to the government for indicating that they have support for this. The amendment was modified in discussion with the government, so I thank them and Mr Newbury, the Shadow Treasurer, for the work done on this. Perhaps without revealing the full outings in party rooms, I should indicate that the Deputy President was very strongly, on the basis of Rochester and other examples, the proponent of this idea that there be proper protections. I think I have said enough. But this is one of those things where there is an opportunity to come to some bipartisan position, and for that I thank the government and Mr Newbury for the work they have done.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The Greens are supportive of this amendment. We think this is a really good initiative. Obviously we are seeing increasingly frequent extreme weather events that are affecting people's properties, often leaving them with uninhabitable properties for extended periods of time, so we really welcome this amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES: I concur with Mr Davis's assessment. This has been a collaborative effort. It formalises current practice in many ways, but making it more clear is a good thing. We thank the opposition for their amendment.

David LIMBRICK: The Libertarian Party will also be supporting this amendment. It seems entirely reasonable, and it does seem unfair that someone pay tax on property that they are unable to use. I will also be supporting this amendment.

Suggested new clause agreed to; new clause postponed; clauses 17 to 23 agreed to.

Clause 24 (11:19)

Jaclyn SYMES: I move:

1. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**
Clause 24, lines 14 and 15, omit “12 months but less than 3 years” and insert “the prescribed period or, if no period is prescribed, any period.”.
2. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**
Clause 24, after line 15 insert –
‘(2A) After section 70F(2) of the **Land Tax Act 2005** insert –
“(2A) The period (if any) prescribed for the purposes of subsection (2) must not exceed 12 months.”.’.

I have outlined the reasons for these amendments and do not intend to repeat that.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The Greens will not be supporting this amendment. We think what the government had originally planned to do was better, and this is a watering down of that and walking back from it. We will not be supporting this and urge them to reconsider this approach.

David DAVIS: The Liberals and Nationals will support the government’s position on this. We have spoken to industry and sector people, and we think it makes sense.

Council divided on suggested amendments:

Ayes (30): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Noes (6): Katherine Copsey, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Suggested amendments agreed to.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

2. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**
Clause 24, after line 15 insert –
‘(2A) After section 70F(2) of the **Land Tax Act 2005** insert –
“(2A) A residential rental agreement referred to in subsection (1) or (2) must be subject to the restriction that any rent increase during the fixed term of the agreement must not require the renter to pay more than 105% of the rent payable immediately before the increase.”.’.
3. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**
Clause 24, after line 19 insert –
‘(3A) In section 70F(3) of the **Land Tax Act 2005**, for “those” **substitute** “the restriction referred to in subsection (2A) and any other restriction”.’.

These amendments are regarding the build-to-rent provisions in the bill. Build-to-rent is supposed to offer tenants the security of longer term leases. The state government has provided generous land tax concessions to incentivise operators to offer tenants leases of at least three years, but evidently build-to-rent operators are finding some loopholes in the minimum term of lease requirements when claiming these concessions, which this bill tries to address. We commend that, but the Greens believe

that there are still too many loopholes. For example, there appears to be nothing stopping a build-to-rent operator offering tenants a choice between two lease agreements for the same dwelling – a three-year lease with excessively high annual rent increases in the terms or a 12-month agreement with the same initial rent. In these circumstances a build-to-rent operator can claim a land tax concession because the three-year lease is genuinely being offered, but the reality is that the tenant is being coerced into choosing the 12-month lease because it will not lock expectations of high annual rent increases into the terms of agreement.

The Greens amendment closes this loophole by requiring that annual rent increases over the fixed term of a build-to-rent lease agreement cannot exceed 5 per cent per annum in order to claim the tax concessions. The amendments do not regulate the starting rental price in a new lease agreement, which may still be set at the premium or high end of the rental market, but it will mean that tenants are genuinely in a position to accept longer three-year build-to-rent leases over shorter term leases, because the longer term leases have to also provide reasonable and stable annual rent increases. If we are serious about incentivising longer term leases in build-to-rent developments, we need to close all the loopholes, and we believe that the Greens amendment helps to at least close one of these.

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Mansfield, I think we have discussed this a little bit, but we do not disagree with your position that the policy intention is for longer leases. We want secure housing, but we do not think that your amendment will achieve that – in fact it may have unintended consequences. We believe it may restrict the rental increase that could be imposed during a fixed-term lease but not when a new lease is signed. It could have the unintended consequence of incentivising developers to encourage renters to take up shorter term leases, therefore defeating the policy purpose. Imposing such a restriction on build-to-rent operators also could distort competition between the build-to-rent sector, where such restrictions would apply, and the rest of the rental market, where they would not. We share views on the intention of the policy, we just think there are too many concerns with the amendment.

Council divided on suggested amendments:

Ayes (6): Katherine Copsey, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Noes (30): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaëlle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Suggested amendments negatived.

Clause postponed; clauses 25 to 43 agreed to.

Progress reported.

Suggested amendments reported to house.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.16, a message will be sent to the Assembly requesting them to make the amendments suggested by the Council. The question is:

That the Council resolve itself into a committee of the whole later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Budget papers 2025–26**

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (11:31): I move:

That the budget papers 2025–26 be taken into consideration.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to the resolution of the Council on 19 May 2025, the budget papers will be debated concurrently with the second-reading debate on the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025.

*Bills***Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025****Budget papers 2025–26***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Gayle Tierney:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

And Jaclyn Symes's motion:

That the budget papers 2025–26 be taken into consideration.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (11:32): This the annual appropriation bill. It is obviously a very important bill. It lays out the government's plans, the government's allocation of resources, and in doing so it is a reflection of the government's priorities. I want to start off with one number which dominates all other numbers, and that is \$194 billion. That is the debt at the end of the forward estimates period. It is a gigantic debt. It is bigger than New South Wales and Queensland combined. It is a debt that will act as a millstone around the neck of Victorians and Victorian children in particular as we go forward. The \$194 billion debt that is planned for our state by this government is a reflection of the fact that it has lost control of the budget.

I want to just step back through some debates we have had in this chamber in recent times. One of those debates looked at the government's control of debt, its removal of a debt ceiling, and we stepped through some of the key issues here. In the early 2000s the Bracks government, with Treasurer Brumby at the time, introduced a debt ceiling of 6 per cent of GSP – gross state product. That was a ceiling that the Bracks government and the Brumby government and the Baillieu government and the Napthine government were all content with. They were able to operate within that and were able to, through that process, deliver on significant infrastructure spending and do that with real aplomb and the ability to support the growth in the population. Then the Andrews Labor government came to power. It too was initially content to live with that 6 per cent GSP debt ceiling, until the week before the 2018 election when we saw the then Treasurer Tim Pallas and Daniel Andrews, the then Premier, out saying they were going to double the debt ceiling to 12 per cent of gross state product. This looked at the time reckless. Even their appearance, even the way they announced this, looked reckless, and so it has proved. Twelve per cent of GSP was the initial target. A little later they just abolished that target itself, that ceiling that had been put in place – a doubled ceiling that had gone from 6 to 12 per cent and then was completely removed.

We also know that the state government has tried repeatedly to blame COVID for the debt. But of course that decision to increase the debt ceiling was taken years before COVID, and the surging debt was already in evidence before COVID. The Auditor-General's report of a year or so ago makes it very clear that only a small percentage, about 19 per cent of the debt, relates to COVID. The rest of the debt relates, in biggest measure, to the overruns in major projects and to huge infrastructure spending and the massive debt that has been incurred by the increases in the cost of projects. It is not

even the initial cost of the projects, it is just the surging overruns in projects, now more than \$48 billion – \$48,000 million – in cost overruns by this government. That has all been added and added and added to the debt like a credit card that is out of control. The state government has not been able to manage this, and we now see Victoria with debt surging to a very high level of \$194 billion – and that is the government sector debt. When broader debt is counted, it is an even greater figure and likely to attract ongoing attention by the ratings agencies. We see publicly that they are highly interested and exercised about Victoria's position and its potential capacity to struggle with these enormous figures. We know that the Treasurer has been jetting around the world, meeting with officials from the ratings agencies in New York and elsewhere, and in doing so going cap in hand to explain why Victoria's position is so serious, so worrying, and in essence trying to convince the agencies that Victoria is still a bet worth backing, still a horse worth backing. I can see why the agencies would be concerned, and I can see why the government and the Treasurer in particular will struggle so hard to convince them.

One of the ways the government has convinced the agencies this year is by bringing in a big spanking new tax, and that is the emergency services tax. It is a shocking tax. It is a new tax on every household, on every business, on every farm. In my area in Southern Metropolitan Region, the truth of the matter is that the increase in taxation that is going to be visited on people will be very significant. People will pay between 60 and 100 per cent more for this than they would have for the old fire services levy. If you run a commercial business, it is even greater. For a commercial premises, it is even greater. If you run a farm – as has been pointed out in this chamber at length when we had the debate – that is a much greater increase again. But make no mistake, the government will take between \$700 million and \$800 million a year extra out of the community, and it will do that by this big spanking new tax. The truth of the matter is that this government tried to say there are no new taxes with this budget. Well, the tax came in just a couple of weeks before the budget, and the impact of that tax will be very significant. There have been more than 60 new and increased taxes under this government, and there will be a whole series of further increases on 1 July. There are increases proposed in my portfolio area of resources and energy and new charges being applied for exploration and permits, massive increases in these – a 234 per cent increase in permit fees for resource extraction. For example, a quarry will need permits. They are going to increase the cost of those permits by 234 per cent. Those costs are of course fed straight into the inputs that are used for construction of government projects, private projects or indeed private housing. Why would you want to jack up the inputs for private housing construction at this time when we are actually trying to see more houses constructed? It is illogical, and it does not make sense. This government, through their imposition of new taxes, new charges, new fees and new levies – they have got every name under the sun for these new charges – are crushing the economy slowly. They are making it more difficult for Victorians.

One of the things I want to point out here is the state government has got a growing economy in Victoria principally because we have significant population growth. And that significant population growth means the economy is inevitably larger than the year before. But income per head and income per household has for a number of years now been falling under this government. So that is a diminishment, a fall, in the standard of living of everyday Victorians and everyday families. And they feel that cost-of-living impact, and they feel it very directly. They feel the day-to-day costs are going up. Now, there are other factors. Of course there are other factors in the overall cost-of-living position. Some of them are federal and some of them are international, but a substantial cause of the increase in the cost of living for Victorians is the higher taxes and higher charges that are levied on Victorian businesses and the higher taxes and higher charges that are inevitably passed through the economy in those increased prices and charges that people feel at the supermarket or with their energy costs – all of those are sectors where we have seen impacts and cost increases that have hurt everyday Victorians. And this government is into another round through the emergency services tax. It is into another round of tax, another round of clobbering Victorian households and businesses.

It is no wonder when you talk to senior businesspeople in this state, when you talk to business organisations or when you talk to the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry or AIG senior members that they are very worried about Victoria. They are very, very worried about Victoria and its

future, and many major firms are looking at other jurisdictions as options, either overseas or interstate. The loss of that investment into Victoria in the long run will have a devastating impact. It is in fact due to the culpability of this government, the failure of this government, to actually put in place a proper system, a proper way forward, that can deliver these services and the infrastructure that is needed in a cost-effective way.

This is the other side of the budget story in Victoria. There are massive increases in taxes, massive increased tax collections, whether you look at land tax, whether you look at stamp duty or whether you look at payroll tax. In all of the major taxes it is up and up and up as Victorian families and businesses are clobbered by these increases in taxes. But on the other side of the equation over here, which is the service delivery side of government, we have seen this government failing increasingly, whether it is in education with declining output and results for many of our students or whether it is in health, where we have seen waiting lists explode out past 80,000 and 90,000 but come back down to about 65,000. That is a huge number of people on the waiting list. That does not pick up all of the people on the waiting list, because there is a prewaiting list. But I want to be clear: when we left government in 2014 the last four-year figures for the waiting list in Victoria was around 38,000. It is now north of 65,000. That is a huge increase. That is Labor not getting on with it, that is Labor failing to deliver and that is Labor's incompetence. Do not think this is COVID either. The waiting list was surging upwards BC – before COVID.

Health, education and transport – we see in transport that the performance of the system has not been up to scratch. The only time that the government has met its benchmarks with transport performance has been in the period of COVID. Once we came out of COVID they again were failing and have continued to fail to meet the benchmarks that are required and that are set out. If you look at the court infrastructure backlog, the government is not delivering the upgrades that are required there. The times to get to trial for the Supreme Court, for the County Court, for the Magistrates' Court and for VCAT are all far, far too long and have gone out further. The time periods are greater now under Labor.

This is the story with Labor. They tax more, they tax harder and they tax more cruelly. At the same time they fail to deliver on the other side. They do not deliver the services that are required. They do not deliver the childcare services that are required. They do not deliver the health services that are required in a timely way. We have heard in the last few weeks the shocking stories from some of our hospitals, principally the Northern Hospital, of the doctoring of the waiting lists. I asked the Treasurer this in the chamber the other day: how can you stand there with your budget when you know that a number of these health figures are at best suspect but actually likely doctored and are seriously underestimating the crisis that we have in our health system? We have got to have basic honesty and transparency in a budget. If you have got a major set of suspect figures, in this case specifically the transfer times of ambulance patients into the emergency departments at our major hospitals, you would be worried – you should be worried. It is not good enough that you cannot attest to the quality of the figure work. If that figure work is shown to be wrong, I think Victorians can be very angry.

The government initially said, 'We'll do an investigation with the Department of Health.' That was clearly completely and utterly unacceptable, because the Department of Health is the agency that is responsible for the results. Northern Health is an agency that is administered through the Department of Health. It was like the Department of Health was checking its own homework, and we all know what happens when that occurs. If you wanted some proper assessment, you needed to go out externally. The government was very, very resistant on that. I noticed yesterday that the Minister for Health in the lower house, under pressure with questioning, actually relented and said there will be an independent investigation. We now know Ernst & Young will do that work, and I would be interested to know who at Ernst & Young is doing that work and what the riding instructions are for that work and what the guarantee of independence is for that work. I say that we actually need clear and strong independent oversight, and we need an investigation that we can be confident about, so the government needs to come clean with some more details on that point.

As I say, the performance in the health system has been shocking. We have heard cases talked about in the chamber today and questions that have been asked over the recent period about cases where the ambulance has simply not got there at all or not got there in a timely way and people have died. This is the result of an incompetent government, a government where standards have slipped and a government where performance outcomes have slipped badly. The government appears to be, I do not know, unworried about the fact that people have suffered because of the poor performance of parts of our health system. I do not blame the doctors, the nurses, the paramedics and the others who are trying to do their best in the system. It is the state government who has got the oversight, the state government who has changed the rules, changed the arrangements, changed the delivery and seen poorer, worse outcomes as a result.

When you look at the performance part of the budget measures in that performance document – the old budget paper 3 but with the expanded performance document, with the bigger size – you look across so many portfolio areas, and the outcomes are not up to scratch. Even in my own portfolio area as the Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources, I look at the outcome there, and the outcome actually is higher costs and less reliable supply. Even some of the budget measures that have been put in place by the government are not being met. The rollout of batteries in a number of places is slower than it should be. The rollout of neighbourhood batteries has not been delivered at the pace the government intended. Again, this is the failure of the government to do the background work, to predict how it is going to roll things out and do things in a timely way and actually deliver the outcomes that are required. But if those batteries are late, that is a problem for the state. That is a problem, and the state government appears to have no response to that. I spoke earlier in the chamber today about Mr Richards from the energy union and his points about the risk with energy in our state. I think he made a number of very sensible points. He is obviously a very sincere and thoughtful unionist and is prepared to make strong points, on behalf of his members obviously but also on behalf of the Victorian community, and he has pointed to the failure of the minister here in Victoria.

Wherever you look in the energy portfolio you see this government, this minister, struggling. If you are talking about offshore wind – I met with some proponents of offshore wind the other day. You know, where is the government's approach to offshore wind? When is this going to come forward? It is clear that the construction side of offshore wind is in some trouble in Victoria. It is clear that the government's plan – and, you know, it is a bit more than a plan; they were out there spruiking this very hard before the 2022 election. We saw Lily D'Ambrosio and Melissa Horne down outside the Port of Hastings, promising that the offshore wind would be constructed there, but they seemed to not have any grip on the fact that there was a planning and approvals process that included the EPBC – the Commonwealth approval process, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 process. Tanya Plibersek, who is no friend of Victoria, I might say, has scotched that project, knocked it on the head as not meeting – and transparently and obviously not meeting – the basic requirements. Who would have thought that trying to put a major construction approach for offshore wind next to a Ramsar wetland could run into any trouble. Who would have thought. I just do not understand this government's approach on a lot of these things.

We have got other problems in the budget. As you dig deeper into the budget you get the very clear issues with sections like the Suburban Rail Loop. There is no detailed figure work there for the Suburban Rail Loop – there are a lot of TBCs – and this is a major problem. There is no clear revenue source for the Suburban Rail Loop. The government says they are going to use value capture, but \$11.5 billion, \$12 billion or \$12.5 billion of value capture is a hell of a lot. We saw the minister a day or so ago in response to questioning certainly not ruling out a congestion levy in the Suburban Rail Loop areas. The damage that is being done to our state's reputation by the government's approach to a number of these major projects cannot be taken lightly. We need to be very clear: the government has not delivered for Victorians.

When we come to other major projects, we are way over budget on the Metro Tunnel. The government says the Metro will be up and running later this year. Well, let us hope that is the case. The Metro will

be probably \$5 billion over budget, maybe more. That is a huge increase. A project that started at \$9 billion and is now nearer to \$15 billion, and probably even more, is a huge change. So all the business case work that is done on one figure is out the door when you see this massively increased figure. The disruption and the outcomes had better be pretty good. But it is clear the government does not seem to have the capacity to keep these projects on track, on time and on budget. There are still other problems with the Metro project too – the issue of the V/Line trains and freight trains on the further parts of the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. The state government has got the faster carriages with the better controls and the better safety features and so forth, but it does not have those features on the other trains on that part of the network, so it naturally limits the outcome.

Then you have got the airport rail link. That is a project that the state government appears just to be unable to land. They should have taken the proposal by IFM. They should have put forward the proposal by IFM, the funds managers and the super funds that actually had a market-led proposal that would have put twin tunnels out of the city, out of Spencer Street, to Sunshine and then out to the airport from there. You would have been able to check in for your flight at Southern Cross. You would have been able to do the trip in 20 minutes, and yet now they are using the Metro and the capacity from the Metro. The proposal is to steal six services an hour from those in the west – six services an hour – when we know that already the capacity of the lines will be well exceeded. This government on delivery of services is failing; huge debt, failing; huge tax increase, failing the community; and families and businesses are feeling the pressure. They can feel the pips squeak under this government as the tax and the pressure is ramped up and ramped up and ramped up. But without the delivery on the other side, the failing education services, the failing health services, the failing transport services – all of those – are the outcomes, despite the massive increase in tax take.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Announcements

Parliamentary officer

The PRESIDENT (12:00): Before we go to question time, I wish to advise the house that, after right on a decade of fantastic service to the buildings and grounds team in the Parliament, Mr Andrew Gaff will be moving on from the Parliament at the end of this week. I am sure all MPs and Parliament staff will join me in thanking him so much. Andrew, like all the buildings and grounds team and all the Parliament staff, has always been very helpful when we have needed help, an all-round good person and a great guy to have a chat with from time to time. We are going to miss him, but we wish him all the best, going on to bigger and better things.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Suburban Rail Loop

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:01): (957) My question is to Minister Shing, the minister for the SRL. I refer to the government's forced acquisition under the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act, listed in the *Government Gazette* of 8 May, of the whole of the land and the buildings of the Waverley RSL sub-branch. I ask: given the 75-year history of the sub-branch, founded in September 1950, what guarantee will be provided that the sub-branch will be able to successfully acquire new land and relocate, and that its critical services supporting returned services personnel will not be interrupted or compromised?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:01): Thank you very much, Mr Davis, for the opportunity to talk to some of the very careful engagement that we are undertaking across the entire corridor of the Suburban Rail Loop East, from Cheltenham through to Box Hill. The RSL has had a very, very proud tradition of engagement across the local community for its tenure at the location. We have staged the construction of Glen Waverley, which as people would know, has involved the relocation of many subterranean works, to enable the RSL to operate from its current

location for several additional years before it has been required for SRL construction. That was the case when I was there not too long ago. We are supporting them to independently explore future opportunities and options, including a potential new location, and that is part of ongoing work with the RSL. We will continue also to make sure that the impact of construction is minimised as the SRL East construction continues and make sure that we are providing every opportunity for the best possible future for the Waverley RSL branch and the project.

The SRL will deliver, as you know, and as the RSL knows, a brand new underground station in the heart of Glen Waverley adjacent to the existing infrastructure, and that will connect more people to this vibrant community as part of the growth that we need to manage a growing population and provide corresponding improvements to amenity at the same time. I want to acknowledge the work that the local member John Mullahy has put into extensive discussions with the community, including with the RSL. He has worked tirelessly to ensure the delivery of additional car parking facilities – we are talking about hundreds of new car parking opportunities. We are also working alongside traders, businesses and communities who use and rely upon footpaths, roads, connections to trade and of course the existing railway station.

This is a project of enormous complexity and size. We do not underestimate the impact that construction is having, and that has been the same with every project, from level crossing removals through to the North East Link, with the way in which we have built, developed and enhanced the road network across the state. We will continue to work with the RSL as we have worked with many organisations affected by construction, including in relation to new and future options available to them.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:05): I thank the minister for her answer, but I want to move beyond the platitudes and ask: what assistance will be provided to the Waverley RSL in locating another premises and obtaining the necessary planning and other approvals, including the rolling over of various licences, to ensure they are able to continue serving their community, including returned service men and women?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:05): I had actually gone to some detail in my answer to the substantive question. That you then choose to characterise that as a platitude pays lip-service to all of the conversations and discussions that are happening continuously with communities and organisations, including the RSL. This government has always respected and recognised the central role of veterans and returned service personnel in their communities, and recognising that contribution and valuing that contribution has been part of a steadfast commitment to the provision of information and support. As I said in my answer to the substantive question, Mr Davis, we will continue to support the RSL with options to independently explore new and future locations, and that work will go on despite whatever slings and arrows you choose to throw in this chamber about that work.

MyCentre

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): (958) My question is to Minister Stitt, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Sheikh Abu Hamza, also known as Samir Mohtadi, is the leader of an organisation called MyCentre. MyCentre has received funding from your government as well as frequent visits from Labor ministers, including I think you. Mr Mohtadi recently called our Jewish community ‘bloodsucking humans’ and ‘scavengers’ and called on Allah to ‘cast terror into the hearts of the Zionists’. He also claimed that Islam was at war with Australia. Minister, will your government be reviewing multicultural support to this organisation and/or its associated entities?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:07): I thank Mr Davis for that question. I got a similar line of questions at my recent PAEC hearing appearance, and I indicated at that time that I would be taking the specific questions around specific grants to individual organisations on notice. And I will be providing a written response to PAEC in accordance with their requirements, but it is important to note that the

multicultural affairs portfolio issues hundreds and hundreds of grants every year, which is important because it is about recognising the incredible work that our multicultural community organisations do right across the state. I am not going to be drawn, Mr Davis, on what you are saying about individual organisations. I would caution you to be quite careful about your understanding about what organisations individuals are associated with or not, so I would caution you against doing that.

What I will say is that our government has actually led the debate about how important social cohesion is in this state. That is why our government has commissioned George Lekakis to conduct a review into our multicultural settings, including a requirement in the future for organisations that are applying for government funding to agree to a social cohesion pledge. I have asked Mr Lekakis to consult closely with a number of different community organisations across the multicultural and diverse communities that we have here in Victoria to give us advice about the nature of that pledge. But what I would say is that I expect, and my department works very closely to ensure, that anybody who applies for government funding through the multicultural affairs portfolio, whatever grant stream that might be, adheres closely and in accordance –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Both sides of the chamber.

Ingrid STITT: What I was attempting to point out to Mr Davis is that any organisation applying for government funding in the multicultural affairs portfolio is required to adhere strictly to the guidelines for whatever grant stream they are applying for, and my very strong expectation is that any organisation in receipt of government funding does the right thing.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): What was notable about that was the minister's failure to engage with the details of this particular case and this particular question. I think it speaks volumes of the government's failure to look at social harmony by not engaging with this. I thereby want to ask: in November 2022 Labor MPs the Honourable Enver Erdogan, Iwan Walters and Kathleen Matthews-Ward announced AMF, in partnership with MyCentre support services, would receive \$250,000. Can you confirm if this funding has been remitted, and if not, will the partnership be reviewed given the horrific comments of Sheikh Abu Hamza?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:11): Again, Mr Davis is conflating a number of organisations and individuals in the way he frames his questions. I have already taken these matters on notice, at my PAEC hearing. I will be providing a written response to PAEC in accordance with the timeframes that they have set out. I invite Mr Davis, through the members opposite who are on PAEC, to carefully read my written response when I provide it.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, it is not satisfactory for a minister in this chamber to try and flick a response off to a PAEC circumstance. The minister should answer the question here today or provide a written response within a day.

The PRESIDENT: I took from the minister's substantive answer – and she also relied on her substantive answer in the supplementary question – that there were reasons why she would not answer this question, so I take that as being answered.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): I move:

That the minister's answer, or non-answer, be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

The PRESIDENT: I cannot put that question.

David DAVIS: I move:

That the minister's response be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:13): Victoria's housing statement demonstrates a landmark commitment to rural and regional Victoria by setting a target to build 425,600 homes in those communities by 2051. We are taking every possible action available to us to meet this ambitious but achievable target. Through the Big Housing Build alone, our government is investing \$1.25 billion in rural and regional Victoria for social and affordable housing. Included in this particular investment, the Big Housing Build alone commits to a minimum investment guarantee in 18 regional and rural LGAs totalling \$765 million. I am pleased to advise the Parliament that 14 of the 18 councils have met or exceeded their minimum investment guarantee. That includes regional centres like Greater Bendigo, Ballarat and Greater Geelong but also rural and semirural communities like Wangaratta, Horsham and Moorabool. In Latrobe we have got 192 homes, in South Gippsland, eight, and East Gippsland, 94, with a total of 294 new social and affordable homes as far as those investments are concerned. That includes regional centres along the path of future growth and development and key projects completed thanks to the Big Housing Build and various investments like the 44 homes at Templeton Street in Wangaratta that have been delivered thanks to \$13.5 million under the Big Housing Build, and the Golden Square project in Bendigo, which delivered 35 social homes thanks to a \$16 million investment. Across the Big Housing Build we have seen more than 3900 homes completed or underway in rural and regional Victoria since the Big Housing Build was announced, and this is on top of the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund, which will deliver at least 1300 additional social and affordable homes across rural and regional Victoria. Work is progressing on a range of projects, and I am looking forward to continuing to see those completed so that people can move into bright, modern, energy-efficient homes that really do them proud.

Firearms regulation

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:15): (959) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Police in the other place. Minister, the UK government this week announced that it will deregulate the ownership of sound moderators for firearms, stating that these items are a firearms accessory that present no danger in themselves to the public. Moderators are also deregulated in New Zealand and are widely owned in Europe and Africa by recreational shooters. Will the minister take up the opportunity to refer moderators to his Victorian Firearms Consultative Committee so as to get an informed view that might counter the silly Hollywood stereotypes?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:16): I thank Mr Bourman for his interest and his question. I will ensure that the question, in line with the standing orders, is passed on to the police minister for a written response.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:16): I thank the minister for his response. Minister, in January a Greens-aligned think tank published a paper on gun control that was commissioned by the prohibitionists. It is nicely called a propaganda piece masquerading as an academic report. Will the minister commit to consulting fully with actual subject matter experts on firearms, most notably the shooting community, before giving any consideration to enacting any of the silly thought bubbles from the gun grabbers' report?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:16): I thank Mr Bourman for his supplementary question. I will pass it on to the police minister for a response in line with the standing orders.

Latrobe Health Assembly

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:16): (960) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. The Labor government's decision to axe Latrobe Health Assembly's funding has devastated

volunteers and the broader community. The assembly has introduced and funded many mental health initiatives to address the disproportionately poor mental health outcomes experienced by Latrobe Valley residents, including the WES mental health service and the Youth Live4Life program. The Latrobe Valley already has the third-highest rate of prescriptions dispensed for mental health conditions in the state. Minister, what will you do to replace these critical mental health services that will be lost if the Latrobe Health Assembly is forced to shut?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:17): I thank Ms Bath for her question. I do need to indicate from the outset, before I go to the issues around mental health, that the Latrobe Health Assembly is actually a matter for the Minister for Health and falls under her portfolio responsibilities. However, what I can say is that the Victorian government remains committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of everybody in the Latrobe Valley community, and we are continuing to invest through the mental health portfolio in very important local and statewide services. The department is working with local partners to ensure that there is continued access to mental health and wellbeing supports for the community, and that includes of course via our flagship services, our mental health and wellbeing locals – and we do have one in Morwell – and Latrobe Regional Health. We have a number of important mental health services out of that health service and of course Latrobe Community Health Service. I do want to also indicate that residents can also access the Commonwealth-funded services, such as Headspace in Morwell for young Victorians, and my department will continue to monitor those local needs as they relate to mental health and wellbeing needs of the community. But again, I would just point out, Ms Bath, that that particular assembly, the Latrobe Health Assembly, is within the Minister for Health’s responsibilities.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:19): I thank the minister for her response. Minister, one of the key initiatives listed in your government’s Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy is item 2.7, ‘Continue to invest in Youth Live4Life’, yet you are pulling funding from that very program by forcing the closure of the Latrobe Health Assembly. Minister, how does shutting the Latrobe Health Assembly and pulling the funding from the Youth Live4Life program align with your government’s own strategy?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:20): Thank you, Ms Bath, for that question. Youth Live4Life are an amazing organisation. I have had the opportunity to visit them at their offices. Up in the Macedon Ranges is where their offices are, but they have programs right across the state. They have received important funding through the 2025–26 budget. They are one of the key prevention organisations in the youth mental health space in Victoria, and I have got nothing but admiration and praise for the work that they do. As I have already indicated in my substantive answer, my department is working closely with the organisation and the community more broadly down in the Latrobe Valley to make sure that there are adequate and important services that continue, particularly, I must say, in relation to youth mental health supports.

Ministers statements: National Corrections Day

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:21): I rise today to celebrate and acknowledge National Corrections Day, which was held last month. It is an important day that recognises the hard work and commitment of our corrections staff that are on the front line every day, keeping us safe. Credit where it is due: Corrective Services NSW introduced this day eight years ago. It was such a success that it is now celebrated across the nation. Our corrections staff and their families deserve a special day that acknowledges the hard work they do in protecting our community. Not only do they provide a safe and secure prison environment, they also support people to turn their lives around, which makes us all safer. The theme for this year’s National Corrections Day was ‘Embracing diversity’. That is about acknowledging the important mix of dynamic and diverse roles that make up Corrections Victoria. This includes prison officers, community corrections officers, post-sentence

workers, programs and service workers, clinicians and health staff. Morning teas and barbecues were held in corrections facilities across the state to celebrate the staff's efforts, and to mark the occasion our state's prisons were lit up in blue. This served as a visual reminder that National Corrections Day is all about recognising our frontline corrections staff. As I have said before in this place, working in corrections can be a rewarding career where you get a chance to make a real difference. We are currently recruiting as we ramp up the system, so to anyone listening that is interested in new career opportunities, I encourage you to apply. And to the thousands of staff who currently work across the state's corrections system, I want to say a big thankyou.

Multicultural seniors support program

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:22): (961) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, the Victorian report on multicultural affairs 2023–24, freshly printed and tabled today, boasts that the multicultural seniors support program is supporting more than 990 seniors organisations to run social and cultural activities, improve digital accessibility and literacy, and purchase essential equipment and resources, and contributes to running and insurance costs. If the government is so proud of this support, why are you planning on cutting this funding from next year?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:23): Thank you for the question, Mr Mulholland. You have not read the budget papers, clearly. We are funding our seniors program. It is an incredibly popular program. It supports just under a thousand senior citizen multicultural organisations to remain connected to their communities and also to reduce social isolation, which we know is a particular issue for many in our multicultural communities. We are proud that the 2025–26 budget includes funding for this important program, and we will be providing those organisations with funding for their activities, including public liability insurance.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:24): I would gladly refer both the Treasurer and Minister for Multicultural Affairs to 'Output initiatives', table 1.20, where the funding for this support drops off when it has always appeared across the forward estimates – so the government is clearly planning on a cut. The reason I say that is that many seniors groups have to plan ahead and use these funds to pay for items like public liability insurance. I ask the minister: given this change, where it no longer appears across the forward estimates, how can these groups plan for the year ahead with a huge cliff in funding from next year – it is not guaranteed – unless the minister is willing to guarantee that funding now?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:25): I do not know what you are reading, but what you have just presented to the chamber is completely misleading and irresponsible. How about you have a look at my PAEC presentation slides, which include and confirm that there will be \$2.1 million worth of support for the multicultural seniors support program. This is an incredibly important program. I am very supportive of it as minister. What you are doing is bordering on irresponsible, because these seniors organisations do not need your fearmongering. What they need is accurate information, and I invite you to actually share that information with the community in a way that does not frighten these people or mislead them.

Latin America trade and investment

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:26): (962) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development. In 2023 the people of Argentina elected firebrand Libertarian President Javier Milei. With a radical economic reform agenda, President Milei has managed to reduce inflation from 160 per cent for the year to 2.4 per cent monthly, with GDP expected to grow by over 5 per cent this year alone. All signs suggest that Argentina may be set for a period of economic growth and investment. President Milei has declared that Argentina is open for business and keen to develop deeper trade ties with Western nations. While there is clearly a great opportunity for Australia to work on a free trade agreement with Argentina, Victoria can act now. Global Victoria has a trade office in

Chile, a country with about half the GDP of Argentina. My question for the minister is: will you contact the Santiago trade office of Global Victoria to ensure that they are maximising the opportunity for Victorian business to develop trading opportunities in Argentina?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:27): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. It is no surprise that he would be watching Libertarian President Milei quite closely. It is fair to say this is a president that is one of the most talked about leaders in the world, and there are a lot of diverse views in relation to some of his policies. However, you have asked me about the capacity I have as Minister for Regional Development to engage with the Santiago office of the Victorian trade and investment office. Santiago was opened in around 2016, and obviously Minister Pearson is the lead minister. But as the Minister for Regional Development and as someone who has just recently returned from America, I have a strong interest in this regard.

The Victorian government is committed to deepening engagement with a range of countries, but Latin America is certainly one of the areas where we are particularly interested in strengthening our trade and business links, and that is the whole reason we set up the Santiago office in the first place. *Globally Connected: Victoria's Latin America Trade and Investment Strategy* was released in 2018 and specifically calls out Argentina as an area of priority for us as Victoria. When it comes to the opportunities and the key sectors that we look to work with Latin America on, it would be in relation to the sectors of agrifood, energy and mining, advanced manufacturing and technology. I think the METS sector in particular was one of the driving forces for setting up the office there, and I had some experience in my former portfolio as the Minister for Resources.

There are ongoing opportunities for Victorian exporters to engage with Latin America to continue to diversify their markets. Increased collaboration between Victoria and Latin America, including Argentina, to support the global energy transition is a topic of conversation. Growing engagement between Victoria and the universities in Latin America is something that is proving particularly fruitful in terms of the amount of international students that are starting to come from that region in particular. I was with Nigel Warren when I was in New York. He is the commissioner to the Americas and holds the responsibility for Victoria's interests in Latin America as well. He was previously on the board of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trades Council on Australia Latin America Relations and was previously posted in Santiago. I had a really good conversation with him about the opportunities for regional development in terms of attracting investment to the regions, not just to Melbourne. He is just finishing that role, but he is going to Austrade, so he will be particularly valuable in that new role in relation to strengthening relationships between Victoria and South America, particularly Argentina.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:30): I thank the minister for that answer. The *Victorian Industry Policy* was released last week, and amongst other things highlighted was the impact of Victoria's foreign trade offices. Argentina may represent a fantastic opportunity to maximise this impact. When the Latin America trade office was launched, it highlighted, as the minister pointed out, skills where Victoria has expertise to provide value in the sector. Argentina is on the cusp of a mining boom, and Victorian businesses are well positioned to capitalise on this. But it is not only mining; there are opportunities to assist in agricultural development as well. Conversations about expanding trade in Argentina are really pushing on an open door. Global Victoria should be coordinating with the federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to discuss a free trade agreement. My question for the minister is: will you ensure that Global Victoria publishes an update on activities in Argentina?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:31): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. My understanding is that Global Victoria publish information quarterly. I will have a close look at that to see if there is any sort of greater detail that picks up some of the suggestions that you make. As I indicated with my comments in relation to Commissioner Warren moving to Austrade, I think that close connection between Global Victoria and Austrade will be invaluable for identifying new opportunities, and I think, as I am on the

record of saying, there is a lot of interest in looking at countries outside the US in relation to diversification et cetera. We have recently also had some inbound trade missions or delegations, particularly mining delegations, including those from Argentina. I do not have the details of that inbound mission; I just know that it happened. I know you have mentioned the METS sector and the mining sector in particular. I also, particularly with the regional development hat on, have an interest in agriculture and AgTech. There are some things going on, but now that I know your firm interest, I will make sure that any information can flow to you.

Ministers statements: apprentices and trainees

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:34): The Allan Labor government is backing our apprentices with a new apprentice help desk. Last week I launched the new help desk, a free service that provides advice and support to apprentices and trainees. This is part of a \$9 million package to improve fairness, safety and mental health for apprentices and trainees, supporting them to complete their qualification so they can start their great career. It is staffed by trained apprentice case support officers. It can provide information about wages, training contracts, rights and responsibilities, and importantly health and wellbeing at work. It can also help apprentices and trainees report serious issues, such as bullying and harassment, to the right regulator. The apprenticeship help desk builds on the success of Victoria's apprenticeship support officer program that provides support to apprentices on TAFE campuses. These are nation-leading programs overseen by Apprenticeships Victoria to support apprentices to complete their apprenticeship and start their career. Last week I attended the Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council meeting, where I strongly advocated for improved safety and culture and fair wages for apprentices. Closing the gender gap and encouraging more women into traditionally male-dominated trade apprenticeships is also a priority that Victoria has ensured is on the national agenda. The apprentice help desk is available 9 to 5 Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays. If you need support, call 1300 311 820. More than 40,000 trade apprentices have been issued their trade papers and have started their careers since 2019. We want to see even more apprentices succeed, and we are giving them the quality training and support that they need to do just that.

Water policy

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:35): (963) My question is for the Minister for Water. The Commonwealth has acquired 13,114 megalitres of Goulburn water at a premium price of \$4810 per megalitre, more than \$1000 above the seasonal average. The buyback is devastating as it not only removes further water from the irrigators' pool but also puts farmers under financial pressure during a drought, undermines the integrity of the water market and raises concerns about how the water can be delivered. Minister, at a press conference in Shepparton last week you said you had requested an absolute pause on buybacks by the Commonwealth and the public release of the Commonwealth's socio-economic impact document. Minister, have you been successful in securing the agreement of the Commonwealth to your two requests?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:36): I thank Ms Lovell for her question and the opportunity to talk about this. The position of the Victorian government is clear: we are absolutely opposed to buybacks. Buybacks are a significant issue for irrigators and for communities along the river. Essentially it is about an implementation that enables a very dysfunctional approach to what is considered to be just completely inappropriate. It will lead to greater inefficiencies in terms of the irrigation system, and it will also mean that the costs will be shifted to those that continue to be in the irrigation system, and of course that is why I have asked the Commonwealth to provide the work that they have done on the socio-economic impacts of the buybacks. I have also, along with the VFF, called for an immediate pause on the buybacks, because we believe together that a joint approach is the best approach, and we will continue to call for a pause on the buybacks, particularly given the issue of drought in this state. This was an issue that I canvassed yesterday in the house and I will continue to canvass, and of course I will continue to prosecute this and have the support of the drought taskforce that the Premier has established. We will be meeting

again this Friday, and again we will be pursuing not just what we have dealt with in the first meeting and the second meeting but also there will be further work that will be done on Friday to add to what needs to be done to mitigate the impacts of the drought that we are facing right across this state.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:38): Minister, given you have failed to secure those commitments, will you now stand up to the Commonwealth by leading a delegation of Goulburn irrigators and community leaders to Canberra and bang on the doors of the water minister and Prime Minister until the federal Labor government understand the devastation they are causing in Victoria with their destructive water policies?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:38): I think my position in relation to issues connected to this matter could not be clearer. They have been –

Members interjecting.

Gayle TIERNEY: My focus is on the taskforce that is attached to the drought issues that are confronting this state, and I will be joining the Premier and taskforce members again this Friday. We have got a very cooperative approach on that taskforce. The taskforce not only involves other ministers and of course the Premier chairing, but we have the VFF there, we have the CWA, we have the National Centre for Farmer Health, we have banking entities around the table, and I will continue to work heavily with the local community, including the mayor of Shepparton, who has played a very positive and active role in the taskforce, and we will together work out what we will continue to do in the area of Shepparton in particular.

Gendered violence

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:39): (964) My question is to the Minister for Police in the other place. The *Herald Sun* has reported that Victoria Police are rejecting the coroner's recommendation to warn women when their violent ex-partners are about to be released from prison. We know that victim-survivors should not be left in the dark, especially against the backdrop of a family violence emergency. Being notified of their abuser's release creates an important protective barrier. It gives victim-survivors time to relocate, access support and take steps to stay safe. It is a basic life-saving measure that must be guaranteed. A notification might have saved the life of Noeline Dalzell, who was tragically murdered by her ex-partner not long after he was released from prison. Minister, what actions are you taking to improve systems and reassure victim-survivors that they will be kept safe from their violent ex-partners?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:40): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for that question. In line with the standing orders, I will seek a written response from the Minister for Police in the other place.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:40): Thank you, Minister, for that referral. We know that timely information can be the difference between life and death for women experiencing violence. When coroners make a recommendation after a woman has been killed, it is because they believe that death was preventable. Is the minister willing to commit to reviewing how Victorian Police's time and resources are prioritised to implement the coroner's recommendations?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:41): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for that supplementary question. I will also pass that on to the Minister for Police in the other place, in accordance with the standing orders, for a response.

Ministers statements: Refugee Week

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:41): This week is Refugee Week, and I want to acknowledge the

profound impact that the refugee story has had on our state. Supporting people who seek refuge is part of our identity as modern Victorians. We welcome between 4000 and 6000 refugees every year, and we are proud to live in a state that is enriched by their contribution, from the migration of Vietnamese refugees 50 years ago to more recent arrivals from places such as Afghanistan, Ukraine and Palestine.

We know our refugee communities face significant barriers in accessing opportunities, which can make their journey to settle here very challenging. It is why we are supporting our refugee communities with over \$20 million in programs through the 2025–26 Victorian budget. We are investing \$3.6 million over two years to support regional organisations to deliver settlement supports and for the fantastic supported playgroup programs of the Victorian Cooperative on Children’s Services for Ethnic Groups, which connect refugee mothers and families with their community. We are also delivering \$7.6 million to the Migrant Workers Centre to protect vulnerable workers and a range of initiatives to provide health and education supports for newly arrived migrants in Victoria, including over \$56 million through the education portfolio for English as an additional language classes. We are also supporting the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre to provide targeted mental health supports and to Foundation House to continue the delivery of their trauma-informed counselling and group programs.

Refugee Week is an important opportunity for communities across Victoria to come together, to listen, to learn and to stand in solidarity with refugees and people seeking asylum. Our government is proud to continue to support our refugee communities.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:43): Can I thank Mr Erdogan for referring questions from Ms Gray-Barberio and Mr Bourman to the Minister for Police. You will chase both up under the standing orders.

Georgie Purcell: On a point of order, President, I have a number of unanswered questions: constituency question 1572, constituency question 1557, constituency question 1586, constituency question 1620, constituency question 691 and question without notice 43. Some of them are extremely overdue – some over a year – and I would ask that you get a response if possible.

The PRESIDENT: Could I get a minister to commit to chasing up those outstanding responses?

Harriet Shing: Thanks, President. I will follow those matters up.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, I listened carefully then. I am not sure that Ms Stitt is going to provide an answer within a day, as would normally be required for a question in her portfolio. She seemed to say we should wait until the Public Account and Estimates Committee provides an answer, but she actually has the capacity to get an answer and should do it for the chamber in a day.

The PRESIDENT: Yes. I am happy to review that in *Hansard* during the day. I did say in real time, and I did understand in real time, that the minister actually gave an answer saying that there was a reason why she could not respond today. I will review that.

Constituency questions

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:45): (1655) My constituency question is to one of the most important portfolios in the government, the Minister for Skills and TAFE. Minister, how will the apprentice help desk assist apprentices in Eastern Victoria? Undergoing an apprenticeship can be one of the most rewarding things that any Victorian can do, but it is not without its challenges. Many apprentices and young people are just beginning their work life and need to juggle TAFE and adjust to a new work–life balance. Naturally many apprentices have concerns during this time, whether it is about navigating TAFE, learning about their rights at work or how to access the many services that government offers them. It is not always easy to discuss these topics in a workplace, which is what makes providing additional avenues of information so important. Because apprentices can be

vulnerable to exploitation, unsafe work and mental health pressures, it is our responsibility to provide the support necessary for them to complete their qualifications and thrive. Eastern Victoria is home to some of the highest numbers of trade qualifications, and with this government's determined infrastructure agenda and ambitious housing targets, we now rely on our tradies more than ever to continue to maintain and improve our quality and affordability of life.

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:46): (1656) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it raises serious concerns about V/Line services, particularly between Ballarat and Ararat. As reported on the front page of the Ballarat *Courier* today, young teenager Jacob raised concerns over what he witnessed while on the V/Line service. The most shocking incident amongst a multitude of incidents was witnessing two people overdose next to him and his friend on the train. I quote from Jacob directly:

We got to just out of Beaufort and both of them became unconscious ... that's when the conductor tapped one of them to see if they would wake up, and they didn't.

It was found out later that one of those people passed away. Minister, we have a serious problem on our public transport network when we have drug taking and antisocial behaviour. My question is: what are you going to do to fix this serious problem?

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:47): (1657) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my constituents ask: when will the crumbling road surface of the Katamatite-Nathalia Road between Gilmores Bridge and Currie Lane, Katamatite, be fixed? While my constituents would like to thank the minister for finally fixing most of the Katamatite-Shepparton Main Road, they are a little dismayed at the fact that there are still dangerous sections that have yet to be fixed. Could this possibly be due to the semantics of a section of the road being called a different name? The section of the Katamatite-Nathalia Road my constituents are asking about is particularly dangerous. The surface is crumbling, and large potholes have formed. Drivers are faced with having to swerve into the oncoming lane to avoid damaging their vehicles. It seems that it is just pure luck that there has not been an accident along this section of road yet. Crumbling roads are an ongoing issue for my constituents in Northern Victoria Region. Barely a day passes when I do not see or hear of a road that is in need of some repair. The patch fixes we are seeing all over Northern Victoria Region are just not good enough. My constituents ask the Minister for Roads and Road Safety: when will the crumbling road surface of the Katamatite-Nathalia Road between Gilmores Bridge and Currie Lane, Katamatite, be fixed?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1658) My constituency question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and I ask: how is the Victorian government providing vital support to the constituents I have got in the Southern Metropolitan Region who may be in financial hardship or facing financial difficulties? We know that there are many in our community, including some constituents in Southern Metro who I have had emails about in recent times, who are facing significant financial difficulties, with lots of financial pressures that are piling up, many through no circumstances of their own. There is support available. For example, the state government in the recent budget provided \$4 million to Mortgage Stress Victoria to help them provide valuable support and financial planning, particularly to those who need to look at how they structure and restructure their loans. I think everyone in this chamber and beyond would agree that for people in financial stress it is important to provide them with the support that they need to get them through.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1659) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Environment. Last year I raised concerns about the vandalised and rotting W-class trams placed in Wattle Park. Very important to members of my electorate, much loved but much neglected, the trams have been sitting there decaying, getting increasingly vandalised for the better part of four years. In December the minister advised that Parks Victoria, VicTrack and Heritage Victoria were working to identify replacement options, with restoration works expected to be completed by mid-2025, and it is now mid-2025. The trams remain untouched. They are still fenced off, being increasingly vandalised, and the only progress is the addition of a sign saying that there will be work done by mid-2025. The question is: Minister, will you please explain why the works have not been completed to date and on schedule and let the community know when we can expect the restoration of these iconic trams?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1660) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General. My constituent is a proud mother and grandmother from Dandenong. She was 18 when her first child was born, in 1967. Before she could hold her newborn, the baby was taken and put up for adoption without her consent. For decades my constituent has been fighting for justice, alongside an estimated 250,000 Australians impacted by forced separation and closed adoption. At its height, from the 1950s through to the early 1980s, these mothers endured abhorrent treatment. Recommendation 24 of the inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria called for changes to the Wrongs Act 1958 to give these mothers greater access to justice. Despite the Victorian government committing to exploring reform, nothing has actually changed. My constituent asks: when will the Attorney-General implement recommendation 24?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1661) Today I have got a constituency question for the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place, Lily D'Ambrosio. This government knows that across Victoria there are people that are doing it tough. We are absolutely committed to easing cost-of-living pressures for Victorian families, and the upcoming \$100 energy bill rebate is a prime example of this. It is programs like this, that are aimed at helping Victorians meet the cost-of-living crisis and easing the hip pocket, that make all the difference. Our previous energy bill rebates were very successful right around the state, and I know that when we had those first few rounds my office had a huge influx of people wanting to come and apply for them. I am expecting the same with the new round to happen later on. My question today for the Minister for Energy and Resources, on behalf of my constituents, is: what sort of households in Northern Metro will be eligible for the new power saving bonus, and what could they expect to save?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:53): (1662) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. I was contacted by a distressed resident who regularly travels on Latrobe Valley Bus Lines, Public Transport Victoria. They raised some serious issues, which are ongoing there, of anti-social behaviour, allegedly involving weapons, physical and verbal assaults, drug and alcohol use in addition to fare refusal. Sadly, the Latrobe Valley has a very high crime rate, and elderly passengers are frightened by these unacceptable behaviours that appear to have been rapidly deteriorating in the past two years – unruly teens acting with impunity. The bus company is doing all it can to protect its own staff and the passengers, and our under-resourced police are often unable to respond in a timely manner. Safe Transport Victoria has the responsible nature to actually protect the bus drivers and passengers. I ask the minister: what will you do, working with Latrobe Valley Bus Lines, to provide extra security measures at interchanges to make sure people and bus company staff arrive at their destinations safely?

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:54): (1663) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Serendip Sanctuary has long been a beloved natural educational and recreational treasure for tourists, Lara locals and the Greater Geelong region. In 2023 the Victorian government allocated \$11 million to revitalise Serendip and the You Yangs through a redevelopment project led by Parks Victoria. Concerningly, constituents have shared their disappointment with the lack of transparency and collaboration during consultation with community members and the stakeholder reference group, which was formed to provide oversight. The people of Lara still have no clear answers on where this money has gone, nor have they seen a clear timeline for infrastructure repairs, including restoration of the display pond, identified as a priority since 2019. Minister, will you provide a detailed financial breakdown of all project spending to date?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1664) For the second time this week I intend to raise a matter in the constituency question for the attention of the Minister for Planning. I am particularly concerned about the 18 Windsor Avenue proposed rooming house that has a whole community in absolute uproar. I met last Thursday for the second time with a group – a large group, more than 65 people – at 6 pm on Thursday night in the dark and in the cold. But people came out, they were so concerned about what the government is allowing through the laws and rules that are in place that enable rooming houses to be flicked into residential areas. What I am seeking this time is for the minister to come out and meet me and the community groups that are agitated and very unhappy with the government's approach. Come out and meet us in the coming weeks, and I will invite the local member, who has been absent on this; it is Mr Fregon. Will you meet us?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (1665) My question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. On 5 June rescuers from Fly By Night Bat Clinic were called to a grey-headed flying fox hanging from a powerline with a fishing hook through his lip and a large tear in his wing. Just weeks earlier another flying fox was found in Bendigo with a hook pierced through her mouth and nostril. Wildlife carers in my electorate have reported a noticeable spike in injuries caused by fishing gear, coinciding with the Allan government's Little Angler program, which is distributing 95,000 fishing kits to nearly 2000 schools across the state. While we cannot say who was responsible in these specific cases, what we do know is that poor practices around discarded fishing gear are already harming native animals, and these behaviours risk being passed on to children through this program. Will the minister match the \$1.5 million initiative with education to promote safer wildlife-friendly fishing across northern Victoria?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:57): (1666) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport: when will you finally carry out the essential bus network review for Shepparton? The Allan Labor government has once again failed Shepparton residents. The 2025–26 state budget provides funding to improve bus services across the state, including bus network reviews in Labor's priority regional areas of Geelong, the Bellarine Peninsula, Ballarat and Bendigo, but not Shepparton. The last time bus services in the Greater Shepparton area were reviewed was in 2009, over 15 years ago. Since then there have been significant shifts in the demographics of the region, with growth expected to continue and accelerate. There is not one bus service that connects workers with the industrial estate in Shepparton. It would be impossible for someone from Mooroopna to use the bus to get to work at the Shepparton Marketplace, and services do not even connect Mooroopna and Tatura with Shepparton on the weekends. I have repeatedly called for a bus network review, and it is time Labor stopped ignoring the needs of Greater Shepparton residents, who deserve much better.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (1667) My constituency question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Sex workers and advocates in Melbourne's north-east have raised concerns about the financial discrimination that they face from clients and from financial institutions. They have told me of instances where clients refuse to pay or provide false transaction details, leaving them without expected income, as well as financial institutions who deny access to their products, such as merchant services. Sex workers and advocates have told me that this takes a toll not only in sustaining a financial loss but also in the emotional and psychological impact of this behaviour and discrimination, not to mention the pursuit of justice being difficult and exhausting. Minister, can you provide an update on what the government is doing to address these issues, ensuring sex workers in my region are able to work free from this discrimination, particularly highlighting any support services that are available in my electorate?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:59): (1668) My question for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety concerns the absurd fine imposed on my constituent, Condah farmer Graham Thomson, by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. Mr Thomson was fined \$398 for carrying two bales of hay just 600 metres to help a drought-stricken neighbour. He used his tractor forks, checked for traffic and posed no safety risk, yet was penalised for not restraining the load. This happened during one of Victoria's worst droughts, on the same day as a farmer mental health day at the local pub. The idea every bale must be put on a truck to be transported any distance whatsoever is ridiculous. Minister, you oversee the NHVR – will you lobby your federal counterpart to have this case reviewed and push for more flexible, commonsense enforcement, especially in times of drought, so we can support our farmers rather than punishing them for helping their neighbours?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (1669) My question is to the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. A constituent, Robert Gordon, has raised concerns regarding delays to a much-needed housing development in Murphy Street, White Hills. Mr Gordon states that the site already has vehicular access via an existing gravel road and notes that under the act such access means the land should not be subject to a land use activity agreement. They are requesting that the planned 20- to 50-metre extension of the sealed road be excluded from LUAA requirements on the basis that (a) the land already has constructed road access and (b) extending the sealed road does not impact traditional owner rights or cause either economic or non-economic loss. Minister, will you consider Mr Gordon's request and respond to his inquiry to ensure that this matter is resolved, so that this housing project can proceed without further delays?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (13:01): (1670) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and is regarding the Victorian bus network reform plan. I have been contacted by a constituent, Charis, who raised with me that it has been three years since the promised bus reform implementation plan was initiated and now two years since the pilot engagement report was released along with the summary of the pilot's findings. Can the minister please update my constituents on when the government plans to release the long-awaited Victorian bus network reform plan? Specifically, when is the plan to be implemented for my constituents and when can my constituents in the western suburbs expect more frequent bus services, improving reliability and connectivity?

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

*Bills***Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025****Budget papers 2025–26***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): I rise to make a contribution on the cognate debate of the budget papers 2025–26 and the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025. This is the budget that was pitched by the Labor government as being about doing what matters most to Victorians. Not one time did the Treasurer mention our natural environment or climate change in her speech to outline this year's budget in the other place. I do not say that as a personal reflection on the Treasurer, but as is often said, budgets are about priorities. Climate and our environment should be a top priority for every single government in this country and across the world, including this Victorian Labor government. Failing to protect our climate and our precious natural places is the greatest threat to human existence of our time, and it does not even rate a mention in the budget speech. To say that is deeply concerning is an understatement.

Things out there are pretty dire. Victoria has over 2000 threatened species and ecosystems, and most of our biodiversity indicators have been reported as poor and declining by the state of the environment report. We have already entirely lost at least 18 mammals, two birds, one snake, three freshwater fish, six invertebrates and 51 plant species since colonisation. Extinction is not something that you simply come back from. Each species that we lose has rippling impacts across our ecosystems. There is just no second chance. The current situation in Victoria means that species and ecosystems – whole ecosystems – are becoming extinct faster than the government can act. The current approach means that policies and funding are too often reactive and insufficient, and it is terrifying. What will happen when our native species and ecosystems just cannot keep up, when climate-induced impacts to our environment are so frequent that nature and our communities cannot recover? This is the existential threat of our time. We need urgent action, and too often instead we see the Labor government choosing to keep our natural environment on life support rather than stepping up to rebuild and to protect our species and our ecosystems. But there is another way if we work with communities to understand what they need to keep their natural places safe and thriving. We invest in restoration jobs and species recovery, we stop the cuts to fisheries workers and we take action to reduce our emissions and create sustainable communities. Things can turn around if we work at it.

It is also vital that First Nations people are at the centre of restoring Victoria's lands, waters and animals to health. For too long traditional knowledge and practices have been erased and ignored, causing ecosystem breakdown, extinctions and a massive loss of biodiversity and wildlife. We must prepare our communities and our natural places to be resilient in the face of a changing climate and increased natural disasters. As part of this action, we should stop all new coal and gas projects and move swiftly to 100 per cent renewable energy. We need to make sure that our planning system is promoting cooler, greener neighbourhoods. We should be committing a consistent, fixed, substantial percentage of the state budget to protecting and restoring nature with a comprehensive plan for zero extinction, with significant increases in funding for national parks management and expanding marine national parks as well as investment to restore our urban biodiversity in cities and towns with healthy, swimmable rivers, bee and bird corridors and biodiverse urban forests and green spaces.

Budgets are an opportunity for a government to highlight its priorities, to literally put its money where its mouth is. And while there has been some funding for some important, some vital, environmental programs, in the grand scheme of things it is just far too little. I do not say that to discount the commitments that have been secured by my colleagues, and I do not say that to discount the initiatives and the outputs in this budget that are wholeheartedly supported by the Greens. What I am stating is simply a fact. To this government I say: invest. Invest in our planet, in our environment, in nature and

in the world around us, which is under threat. The skies, the waters, the land and those we share it with – people and planet, all of us together – are what matter most.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:07): I rise to make a contribution to the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. Unsurprisingly, when I look through the budget papers, the first line items that I look for are cannabis related. Last year's budget provided \$4.9 million for a medicinal cannabis driving trial, recognising the need to change our laws that currently criminalise medicinal cannabis patients regardless of whether they are impaired. The Victorian government has had almost a decade to address this issue since medicinal cannabis was legalised, and the best they could offer was a study that could tell us what other studies have already told us – patients can and do drive safely. This trial also came with no promise of change to the laws. As you can imagine, we did not jump for joy at this announcement at the time. In the meantime, we have been successful in securing amendments to the law to ensure medicinal cannabis patients that are not impaired do not automatically lose their licence. We will continue to monitor the progress of the driving trial and push for a government response prior to next year's election.

In this year's budget, we face a similar, albeit slightly better, promising situation. This budget includes \$400,000 to commence the development of standalone industrial hemp legislation to address regulatory barriers and support the growth of the emerging Victorian industrial hemp sector. While we welcome any investment in industrial hemp, much like the driving trial, we are not optimistic of an outcome before the next election, even though the work has already been done. Legalise Cannabis's Hemp Industry Bill 2024 that we debated last year would have created a standalone industrial hemp act to address these kinds of regulatory barriers. Yet this government continues to have a blanket ban on supporting private member's bills, preferring progress at a snail's pace. We appreciate that the minister and their department want to ensure that any legislation is effective in achieving this aim; however, the idea that even after a draft bill has been tabled and an inquiry completed it would still take multiple years and hundreds of thousands of dollars to draft is government bureaucracy at its finest. While this budget did not include everything we would have liked to have seen, I would like to focus now on some of the highlights.

First Step received funding that will allow them to support the mental health care of high-needs individuals who fall outside existing eligibility criteria. This mental health, addiction and legal services organisation supports over 1800 clients annually. Its multidisciplinary approach aims to bring together medical, clinical mental health, psychosocial and legal professionals to provide wraparound care and support for those experiencing complex mental health challenges, addiction and other social disadvantages. I was delighted to see the government listen to calls from me and my colleagues to fund this service.

It was great to see this budget including funding for the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. I raised in Parliament the shocking situation that they are in. Their main office in Dandenong is crumbling and full of asbestos and has structural failures. The building is so unsafe they are currently operating out of emergency accommodation. This funding will assist with securing appropriate accommodations and ensure the continued delivery of culturally safe, holistic wellbeing services to 13,500 local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

We were also pleased to see the announcement of free public transport for under-18s and for seniors on weekends. What a great idea. In fact it sounds a lot like our motion we debated last year calling for free buses. At the time the government did not seem interested in any sort of free public transport, so this announcement is a welcome change of tune. Accessible public transport helps connect people to community and lead better lives as a result.

Other highlights for us included a number of funding initiatives for the LGBTIQ+ community. \$15 million was allocated to support mental health for trans and gender-diverse people and \$1 million to enable the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to continue its important work to eliminate the cruelty of harmful practices like conversion therapy. Off the back of the passage

of anti-vilification laws earlier this year, now is the time to ensure VEOHRC are funded and resourced to continue their essential work protecting vulnerable and marginalised Victorians.

We were also pleased to see significant funding in this year's budget for family violence and sexual violence support services. This included extra protections within specialised family violence courts to ensure victim-survivors feel safe, one-on-one case management to help victim-survivors rebuild their lives, continued funding for after-hours crisis line support and specialised family violence legal services. When one in three Australian men report using intimate partner violence, these kinds of measures are unfortunately much needed. The study from the Australian Institute of Family Studies tracked more than 16,000 boys and men over a decade. While around one in four had reported using intimate partner violence in their lifetime, this number has since increased to one in three. The most common form of violence reported in this study was emotional abuse, and for a number of reasons these people often do not end up before our court system. That is why we will always advocate for funding in preventative measures, things like strong social and relational supports, so violence can be stopped before it starts.

I would like to now turn to some of the lowlights of this year's budget. For the second year in a row the alcohol and other drug services funding has increased by only 1 per cent. In real terms, this funding will not allow for the proper resourcing of AOD services. Demand continues to outstrip supply, and unless something changes, this government will continue to fail to meet its performance requirements. At the same time the disability and mental health sectors are being left behind by a budget that fails to invest in its workforce. This budget will perpetuate severe underfunding and chronic understaffing. Just on Tuesday nurses and social workers and other mental health professionals walked off the job, and many of them marched and protested out on the steps of Parliament. They called for the government to face up to the fact that the workforce is at least 2300 positions shy of what it needs to be to provide safe and reliable care. It is all well and good to invest in infrastructure, but it means nothing if there is no workforce to operate within it. There is a lot of money being generated by the mental health levy – \$1.1 billion – yet there remains little understanding in the sector of where the money is being spent and what accountability measures are in place. At the same time Victoria's mental health watchdog is suffering drastic cuts to its budget, including plans to cut the number of mental health commissioners from four to one. In this context, unsurprisingly, we are pessimistic at best about the government's ability to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

We do want to note that we were pleased to see \$4.9 million for outreach services in North Richmond to help address the increasing service and amenity pressure experienced by the medically supervised injecting room. Although this budget was silent on Victoria's upcoming 10-year AOD strategy, we remain hopeful that it will provide the opportunity for sustainable renewal and progress.

We were also disappointed to see that for the second year running this government has failed to fund Southside Justice's statewide sex worker legal program. At a time when this service is experiencing increased demand and the review of the decriminalisation of sex work will soon commence, the failure to fund this program and support its invaluable contribution to the community is a mistake. There are also many legal issues that stem from the decriminalisation of sex work – planning laws; equal opportunity laws; and employment, criminal, personal safety and privacy laws, to name a few. A specialised service can offer support across these wideranging needs without the threat of stigma. I urge the government to support Southside Justice's important work to improve sex workers safety and wellbeing and to ensure the effectiveness of sex work decriminalisation.

Following last year's budget we feared that the government had gotten cold feet on essential reforms to the youth justice system, instead opting for things like electronic monitoring. Our fears have further been realised within this budget, with \$727 million to support drastically increased rates of incarceration following this government's regressive bail laws. While I have been assured by the minister that at least some of this funding will be directed to therapeutic services and to addressing root causes of vulnerability, we remain concerned that incarceration is no longer considered a last

resort for young people. At the end of the day we know the best way to keep people from reoffending is to not put them in prison in the first place.

We also know a quality education gives people the best start in life. That is why it is so troubling to see that the government has decided to delay raising school funding to 75 per cent of the schooling resource standard until 2031. This decision effectively cuts \$2.4 billion out of the public school system. This funding is desperately needed to pay for long-awaited Gonski education reforms to address social, economic and cultural disadvantages faced by students. Victorian public schools are now the lowest funded in the country, and Victorian teachers are the lowest paid. That is the Education State for you: cracking down on bail laws, sending more young people to prison and simultaneously stripping money from the public school system.

Before I wrap up, and as a member of the Legalise Cannabis Party, I must mention the budget savings we could see from regulating the personal use of cannabis. Data from the Crime Statistics Agency shows that, on average, over the last four years almost 4000 Victorians have been arrested for possession – possession alone – of small amounts of cannabis every year. According to a report funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund, the average cost of arrest for a cannabis offence is just over \$1900 per person. That is \$7.6 million we are spending every year on arresting people for possessing small amounts of cannabis. This is a disgrace and it is a waste of money. It does nothing to make our community safer, and it ruins the lives of many people, particularly young people. I put the suggestion of regulating cannabis to the Treasurer in this place and was reassured that she will always look for ways to optimise the revenue streams and target expenditure in a way that addresses the priorities of Victorians and benefits them the most – and I will hold her to that promise. On that note, I will end with a message of hope: I hope that by the time next year's budget rolls around I will no longer be imploring the government to save money by regulating cannabis but instead will be thanking them for having done so.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:20): I move:

That the debate on the motion to take the budget papers 2025–26 into consideration be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025

Second reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (14:20): I will sum up on the appropriation bill that we have just been discussing. The Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 creates authority for expenditure in the 2025–26 financial year, so in that sense, although the budget is wideranging, the bill before us today is less so. The bill provides appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the government, for the Parliament and entities related to the Parliament for the 2025–26 financial year, and they reconcile expenditure for Treasurer's advances in the 2023–24 financial year. Advances during 2024–25 from the Treasurer's advances and those available under section 35 of the Financial Management Act 1994 are not brought to account in the annual appropriation bill; they are tabled in the Parliament as part of the financial report for the state of Victoria 2024–25 and formally brought to account in next year's appropriation bill.

Advances relating to 2023–24, which were published in the financial report for the state of Victoria 2023–24, are brought to account in clauses 7 and 8 and schedules 2 and 3 of this bill. The bill carries funding decisions from this year's budget and previous budgets where that expenditure falls in this forthcoming financial year. The bill does not authorise the expenditure outlined in this year's budget for the years beyond 2025 and 2026 – I am just setting the parameters of what this bill actually does. However, appropriation bills are more than just a financial statement; they do put into effect our plan

for the future of the state, and that is a plan that is shaped by discipline, guided by care and defined by a clear focus on delivering for Victorians.

Across our state and of course across the country there are families that are doing it tough. Household budgets are under pressure, prices are rising, wages are stretched, and many Victorians are working harder than ever before to make ends meet. Of course this means that they look to their government for practical support and responsible leadership. This year's budget and the expenditures approved in the bill aim to deliver both. It provides real cost-of-living relief for households and free public transport for every child under 18, which as Ms Payne has indicated, not only is a popular cost-saving measure but brings about equity for many young people, particularly vulnerable young people. There will be free weekend travel for seniors, a \$100 power saving bonus for concession card holders and rebates to support the switch to solar and energy-efficient appliances. These are direct savings, and they will have a big impact on many people.

The budget does not stop at relief: it lays the foundations for a stronger, fairer and more resilient state through investments in the services and infrastructure that Victorians rely on each and every day. In health we are investing in new hospitals and community care across the state, from Footscray to Frankston, from Geelong to the Latrobe Valley. We are expanding mental health services and making common treatments available free at pharmacies, easing pressure on the health system and on household budgets alike. In education we are backing every student in every classroom. We are delivering free kinder for all three- and four-year-olds, extending free TAFE and supporting schools with investments in teacher training, year 12 completion, vocational learning and classroom resources, as well as a lot of infrastructure projects. I take the opportunity to point to some of the projects in the electorate of Northern Victoria, projects that I have been working on for some time. Seeing the funds for the upgrades at Broadford Primary School and Wangaratta High School are certainly highlights of the budget for me personally but also planning money for Yarrawonga P-12 and Broadford Secondary to accommodate and plan for the futures of those towns are welcome additions.

We are ensuring no child misses out on shared school experiences, with \$400 in support for camps, excursions and activities. I have spoken at length in many forums on the difference that that makes in the lives of kids so that they do not miss out on the opportunities that others get. We are supporting jobs, growth and innovation with \$240 million to back Victorian businesses, including targeted support for exporters, manufacturers and regional industries. We are helping businesses reach new markets, create new jobs and adapt to a changing economy. And of course we are building for the future, funding major transport infrastructure like the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel, the Sunshine superhub and the Suburban Rail Loop. These projects are not just about getting people from A to B, they are about connecting communities, supporting housing growth and unlocking long-term economic opportunity for Victoria.

On housing we are taking a comprehensive approach, from the direct support for first home buyers through stamp duty relief to public housing supply and streamlined planning approvals to get more homes built faster and where people want to live. For those doing it toughest we are expanding food relief, supporting interest-free loans through Good Shepherd and funding programs to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

Crucially, we are doing all of this whilst returning the budget to surplus. This budget returns Victoria to surplus in 2025–26, with an average of \$1.9 billion across the forward estimates. Net debt is declining as a share of the economy, and government spending is being brought back to sustainable levels. We are reducing temporary pandemic-era expenditure, eliminating duplication and ensuring that every dollar is invested where it will deliver the greatest benefit for Victorians.

This is a budget defined by responsibility and reform. It reflects the priorities of a government that is focused on delivery and on making lives easier, communities stronger and our economy more secure. It backs our nurses, our teachers, our apprentices and our essential workers. It supports small businesses and growing industries. It puts families at the centre of our decisions, and it charts a clear

course towards long-term prosperity. This bill deserves the support of the house, and I believe we have got there. I think we will get it through committee. I do thank members for their engagement on the development of the budget and indeed in preparation for the committee stage.

The bill represents a fiscally responsible budget. It delivers on priorities that matter to Victorians. It is about easing pressure on households, backing vital services and building the infrastructure and creating the jobs our future depends on. It is not just a budget of numbers, it is a budget of choices, and it makes the right ones – targeted investment, disciplined spending and a focus on what will deliver the greatest benefit to the people of our state. It supports Victorians through the challenges of today and lays the groundwork for a stronger, fairer, more resilient Victoria in the years ahead.

I might leave my comments there, as I understand we can have a fairly wideranging conversation in the committee stage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (14:29)

Jaclyn SYMES: As members will appreciate, this is the first time in a long time that the Treasurer is in the upper house and therefore the first time for a while that the committee stage has involved the Treasurer, and I wanted to acknowledge and thank –

David Davis: I remember the last one.

Jaclyn SYMES: Of course you remember. How long were your committee stages then?

David Davis: They varied.

Jaclyn SYMES: Okay. I make these comments because I have actually been the responsible minister for the appropriation bills for the last four years I think, but this is the first time in the seat as Treasurer. In that regard, there has been some heads-up on the topics that members want to cover in today's committee, and I appreciate that, and I have certainly gone to lengths to obtain information so that I am ready for some of those discussions. But I do want to indicate that that is a demonstration of good faith. There is the ability for me to confine this to the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025. I am not intending to be overly strict in that regard, but I am not the portfolio minister for every portfolio in the government. So where there are topics that are appropriately Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) style questions for relevant ministers, I will hopefully have high-level information that I can provide, but I just want to caveat my attempts to be helpful. I am going to be more generous than the confines of the bill, but I expect probably a little bit in return in regard to that as well.

David DAVIS: I understand the Treasurer's points. This is the appropriation bill. It is a specific bill. There is an associated budget paper. In part of this debate we debate the budget papers bundled up, and the budget papers do lay out the government's spending intentions in greater detail than the schedules that are attached. I just thought I might start with the obvious place, with the schedules, and that is the prior material, and that is the Treasurer's advance (TA). We can just take it in turns. I will have one go on Treasurer's advances and then let you go, and I will come back to other things and maybe just do topic by topic. I do not think the Treasurer will be surprised that I will be asking about Treasurer's advances. There have been forums held in this place about the widespread misuse of Treasurer's advances, and I accept that this time period of the Treasurer's advances, 2023–24, was before her time, so I do not hold her personally responsible for those decisions. But there are questions going forward. There are questions about these specific items, and I could start anywhere, but I might just start with a high-level general question: why on earth are so many items here that are nothing to

do with COVID and nothing to do with urgency? I am just looking, for example, at page 22 on schedule 3, 'Relating to contingency releases' – I am sorry, I have just flicked to the wrong page – page 30, 'Relating to decisions made post budget'.

On Treasurer's advances, in schedule 3 and schedule 2 you see so many of these items. Look at 'Complex inquests at the Coroners Court', 'Cybersecurity response' – I am on page 18, schedule 3 – for example. There are literally dozens – 'Children's Court clinic and conferencing project'. If you turn over the page, there are other examples of Treasurer's advances that have been made that just completely are not urgent – are not for some desperate need. We understand if there is a bushfire that has got to be funded. We understand if there is a flood that has got to be funded. We even understand a pandemic, but we do not understand these other points. And I just want the minister to tell us what is going to be done about this practice of spending \$10 billion or \$11 billion or \$12 billion or \$13 billion on advances.

Jaclyn SYMES: I appreciate the question that Mr Davis has put, acknowledging that he has identified that a lot of the examples he was referring to were from 2023–24. Since becoming Treasurer it obviously has been brought to my attention that there were concerns around transparency and accountability for Treasurer's advances, and I have certainly taken steps in conjunction with the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) to respond to some of those concerns at the outset. Treasurer's advances are for, effectively, milestones, demand and the unforeseen. In this year's budget you will see that almost 99 per cent of all contingencies are set aside for specific purposes and only 1 per cent of contingencies are unallocated. I would also point to the fact that, as a share of the total appropriations, Treasurer's advances have fallen by about 50 per cent in four years, from 19.4 per cent in 2020–21 to less than 10 per cent now.

There is a new way of reporting in this year's budget papers in relation to the contingencies. In particular, in relation to general government output contingencies not allocated to departments, you will see that we are breaking down contingencies into three categories. About the milestones, I think, Mr Davis, you would appreciate the milestones and when bills are due and the mechanism of Treasurer's advances. The second category is future service demand allocation: that is predominantly around price and demand growth for sectors such as health and education. The category that I think we can all agree on, and I think that I agree with you on, Mr Davis, is urgent and unforeseen circumstances, which should be limited to exactly those.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Sorry, Ms Purcell, just before you start. I omitted to welcome our guest who is in the gallery. We welcome the Honourable Veena George, who is the Minister for Health and Woman and Child Development in the government of Kerala, India. We hope you enjoy your time with us today.

Georgie PURCELL: I will be brief. Treasurer, noting your comments at the start, I have done my best to keep my questions relative to the bill or the budget and would appreciate any high-level overview. My first question is on dingoes, which play a vital ecological role as apex predators and hold deep cultural significance for many First Nations communities across Victoria. This year it was announced by the government that \$9.2 million would be allocated in the budget to the vertebrate species management program to lethally control various species, including native dingoes. How much of this figure will go towards lethal control programs?

Jaclyn SYMES: The information I have is that we are providing an additional \$2 million support package to fund trials, research and on-ground advice on nonlethal dingo management strategies.

Georgie PURCELL: My follow-up question was about nonlethal programs. Is there any figure in that allocation for lethal programs, noting that there is just one part of Victoria where the unprotection order has been revoked?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have a dollar figure for you, Ms Purcell. The aim is to strike the right balance between protecting the vulnerable dingo populations while giving farmers the ability to protect

their livestock by remaking the dingo unprotection order only in eastern and north-eastern Victoria until 1 January 2028.

Georgie PURCELL: I have a question, unsurprisingly, on greyhounds. This year the budget allocated \$122.9 million towards the racing industry for support and regulation. Could the Treasurer provide a figure on how much of this is dedicated to greyhound racing, particularly a breakdown on what these figures are used for by the industry?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that granular level of detail, nor is it clear in the budget papers. But it will be forthcoming in annual reports of the racing agencies.

Georgie PURCELL: Given the Victorian government's ongoing financial support for the greyhound racing industry, including a \$3 million interest-free loan to Greyhound Racing Victoria to meet short-term expenditure commitments in 2024, have any additional emergency support payments been provided to Greyhound Racing Victoria? If so, what were the amounts and conditions of them?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, Ms Purcell, that is not a level of detail that I am privy to. I would direct your question to the Minister for Racing.

Georgie PURCELL: Treasurer, one of the most serious and widespread animal welfare concerns raised during the inquiry into Victoria's recreational native bird hunting arrangements was wounding – that is, when birds are shot but do not die. When the Victorian government did not ban duck shooting as recommended by the inquiry, they proceeded with the status quo in 2024 and committed to mandatory shooter education and proficiency testing by 2025. This did not happen, and the season has been and gone. This year the budget allocated \$94.1 million to fishing, boating and game management in Victoria. How much, if any, of this funding is for this promised proficiency testing?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, apologies, Ms Purcell, that is not a level of detail that I have. The Minister for Outdoor Recreation and Minister for Environment should be able to give you more details in relation to that.

Georgie PURCELL: I have asked him as well, so hopefully we will get that answer. On kangaroos, \$2.2 million over two years was allocated to continue the kangaroo harvest management program in Victoria. What has been the cumulative cost to the Victorian taxpayer to kill kangaroos through this program since it began?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, Ms Purcell, I understand your interest in these matters, but that would not be a matter for this budget. This budget is about the money that we are effectively putting out the door in 2025–26. In relation to a program that you are after a cumulative figure on, again I would direct your question to the relevant minister, who would be better placed to get you that type of information.

Georgie PURCELL: Treasurer, on this year's budget, do you have any more detail on how the \$2.2 million for kangaroo management will be used?

Jaclyn SYMES: No. Again, Ms Purcell, effectively, responsible ministers are best placed to talk about what the funding will be used for. Obviously when they put in bids and it goes through the budget process, we have a look at that as a budget committee in determining it. But once it is approved, the responsibility of delivering the programs falls with responsible ministers.

Georgie PURCELL: Treasurer, I raised this one in question time yesterday for the Minister for Community Sport, but this year's budget provides funding of \$40.3 million for community sport and recreation. But it did cut the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation and the prevention of violence through sports program grants, and there is no specific mention of supporting women's sport in this budget. Does the Treasurer have any detail on how exactly the functions of this office will continue? With it being gone, what measures are in the budget for specifically supporting women's and girls' participation in sports?

Jaclyn SYMES: The government will always support women's and girls' participation in sport and recreation. The functions of the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation will continue but have been collapsed within Sport and Recreation Victoria. In relation to programs that actively prevent violence against women or address other gender-based issues through sport and positive programs for women, there is a whole-of-government approach to many of these initiatives, whether it is through the justice portfolio or the youth portfolio. I think you will find that there are a range of programs that go to these exact intentions and ambitions. There is not a view of reducing our attention in this space; it is just delivered in a more streamlined manner.

Georgie PURCELL: On the sex worker legal program – and I know the Treasurer is familiar with this topic – run by Southside Justice, providing critical support and free legal advice to sex workers in Victoria, particularly post the rollout of the decriminalisation of sex work in Victoria the service has been more in demand and more needed than ever before. Previously, in 2022, the government provided \$156,000 for the running of the program, but this year, for the second year in a row, they did not receive any funding within the \$40 million provided to community legal centres. Is there any reasoning for why this decision was made?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Purcell, the advice I have is that the initiative at the time of decriminalisation received program-specific, time-limited funding just for the transition to decriminalisation, and it was certainly made clear at the time that it was a time-limited program. The funding was to support sex workers during the reform process and transition to full decriminalisation, which occurred on 1 December 2023, by providing legal assistance to sex workers during that transition, which is an explanation as to why funding was ceased and did not continue. St Kilda Legal Service had an existing practice of providing legal assistance and outreach to sex workers prior to the commencement of the reform process. Now that decriminalisation has been implemented, it was in line with the commencement of the program that it would cease at that time. I understand your advocacy for legal representation for sex workers, whether it is related to decriminalisation or not, and I would encourage you to take those representations up with the Attorney-General.

Georgie PURCELL: I have just got two more to go, thank you, Treasurer. Since the end of native forest logging on public land the government provided \$1.5 billion in forest industry transition and \$44 million under the future forest banner, promoted as a legacy investment in forest restoration following the end of native forest logging. How much of this funding has actually gone towards ecological restoration and what outcomes have been achieved?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, apologies, Ms Purcell. I am not in a position to provide you with that detail in the context of the committee stage of this bill.

Georgie PURCELL: I thought that might be the case for that one. Just finally, could the Treasurer outline why the government has not included any funding to create the Wombat–Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees national parks in this budget, just particularly noting that there was a commitment to introduce that legislation this year?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not in a position to give you a policy rationale in relation to that matter, except to confirm that it is not part of the 2025–26 budget.

David DAVIS: I should be a little bit clearer about a few points here on schedule 2 and schedule 3. In regard to schedule 2, 'Payments from advances pursuant to section 35', which you mentioned earlier before – if we just stick with schedule 2 for a moment – which is page 17 for those watching, and then 'Relating to decisions made post budget', how is it that the 'Metro Tunnel readiness' or 'Additional authorised officers' are made in this way? 'Metro Tunnel readiness' must have been an item that was understood to be forthcoming – 'Metro Tunnel readiness' here in the contingency releases is \$135-and-a-bit million – and 'Switching on Big Build'. These all must have been known, and why are they not acquitted in the normal way when they are known ahead of time?

Jaclyn SYMES: The practice is to withhold funding and contingency until milestones are met, and that is for a number of reasons. Generally it is because it is not yet to be paid, so it is actually financially responsible for that to be held centrally rather than dished out ahead to all of the departments, so it is about discipline in that regard. A lot of them are known and often disclosed in the total estimated investment (TEI) –

David DAVIS: These were in effect and already authorised.

Jaclyn SYMES: You can still know the amount and withhold it and –

David DAVIS: Authorised subject to completion of X, Y and Z.

Jaclyn SYMES: Correct – that is exactly how it works. So once a milestone is reached it can then be released, and it is just that it happens to be released through the same mechanisms as TAs as to why it is reported in this way.

David DAVIS: The point is that that, in effect, is money that has previously been authorised in principle.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, in effect. The way it would work, without going into deliberations of cabinet, is that the budget and finance committee submissions will often have a project that has a number of steps. You might make a decision to release the first step, then you actually agree to withhold the remaining in contingency, and then the minister will come back and ask for a release of the contingency – you know what it is, it is just not released until such time as it has reached the point that it needs to. It is actually part of our high-value, high-risk gateway process for major projects.

David DAVIS: On the schedule 3 matters – so this is ‘Payments from advance to Treasurer’ – some of these relate to decisions made post budget. I mean, if I look again – this is on page 18 – at ‘Courtlink mainframe replacement’, to be honest it is hard to think of anything that is less urgent in the sense of –

Jaclyn Symes: Tell them that.

David DAVIS: No, I am just making the point that it is not in the mode of a flood or whatever. This could have been made at the normal time and could have been appropriated in the normal way, with a special bill or a whole range of different points. This is actually expenditure that occurred in 2023–24, so that is a long, long time ago. This is the first that it is being brought to book now – is that correct? Or it has already been in the budget, but it has not been appropriated. For example, for this 2023–24 period, why was some of this not in the budget last year? I am picking that one only because it is top of the list.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, that is fine. I think it applies for many of them, I agree. It is retrospective reporting. The expenditure was in the 2023–24 budget. Some of these will be held in contingency for a range of reasons, whether it was subject to a tender process where you did not want to forecast or telegraph to the world what you were willing to pay for that work. Some of those, I think, like cybersecurity response in particular, falls within your urgent and unforeseen. So they would have come out of different buckets, but they are reported. They came out of contingencies, whether they were milestone payments or whether they were held back for commercial-in-confidence reasons or they were urgent and unforeseen, and that is why they are reported now.

David DAVIS: With respect, Minister, this is 2023–24 – this could have been a decision made on 2 July 2023. It could quite conceivably have been in July 2023, in that financial year, and we are now in 2025. It is a hell of a long way later. Why is a lot of this not brought to book, as it were, in the 2024–25 budget? Just the same as I would ask the question now: where are the payments advanced to Treasurer that are in the current year? I accept the current year is not over, and there could be a flood or something still to come, but most of the year is over, a lot of the expenditure – why is that equivalent

amount not brought forward this year? The known ones that have already been committed, why are they not brought forward?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think in relation to some of these initiatives, they are made public in other ways in terms of whether it is just literally as part of a press release for a flood response or something like that or indeed in annual reports of appropriate agencies and the like. As I said, this is not necessarily the first time they have been reported; they are first reported in the annual financial report (AFR) in most instances, so this is just making sure that the accountability is all cumulated into one place in terms of – it is a bit hard for me to determine, because obviously I was not the Treasurer at the time. A lot of these, just looking at them, I know have been made public in terms of the money that has been spent on them. If there are any that have not –

David DAVIS: Let us just take the period from when the Treasurer came into her role in December through until the tabling of the budget. There have been decisions made in that period. Am I to conclude that those things will not be brought through in a budget like this until next year? That seems to me to be a problem. Why couldn't something that is a February item this year –

Jaclyn SYMES: I understand what you are saying. That is why I am trying to make the point that I do not think there is anything new in this reporting; I think it is just the way that it has all been finally tallied up as one. You will see the 2024–25 Treasurer's advances in the September–October AFR. As I said, it is a little difficult for me to see whether there is anything in here that is not already public. I do not know the answer to that, but my advice is that not a lot would be because it has already been disclosed in other forums. But this is, I guess, a responsible way of tallying it all up and making sure that everything is together.

David DAVIS: Perhaps in response to the minister's point – I mean, I am getting a halfway answer, and I think I understand what she is saying, but it does not seem to me to be quite a satisfactory answer. Perhaps as a question on notice you could tell me – somebody could do this – which of these has not been announced previously? I am not expecting you to do that now.

Jaclyn SYMES: Let us do it another way; I will make you an offer. My understanding is that this is a mechanism of providing full accountability. I reckon what I can do going forward is, in looking at what I will be disclosing through the AFR in 2024–25, I will take on board your comments in relation to whether there is anything that would not be there that would then subsequently take two years to be disclosed. I will do it that way.

David DAVIS: I thank the minister for that, because I think it is an important point, and I think if I can just perhaps relay to her, and this is perhaps partially known: the Australasian Study of Parliament Group and others like the Centre for Public Integrity are looking at these matters. I am sure she has seen the correspondence, as I have, and perhaps even had some of her staff attend the seminars and look at the sorts of improvements that could be made. For example, when a major decision is made, perhaps over a certain threshold, it could be notified to the house quite quickly, within 30 or 60 days. You are saying within the quarterly period; that is certainly a vast improvement. If that was achieved, that would certainly be a significant achievement, and I would be very happy to say that.

Jaclyn SYMES: I have been open to ideas about greater transparency and accountability, absolutely. But if we knew everything that was not known, if we were able to know everything that is not known, we would do it differently of course. But we cannot fully predict all of the unforeseen circumstances, milestones et cetera. We do have greater transparency than ever before. This is probably one of the best conversations I have had about TAs, because at least there is a recognition from you, Mr Davis, that it is appropriate to have financial discipline of keeping things to the centre. Other conversations I have had with people are that 'You should give it out and report it.' That is not something we think is a responsible thing to do. So I am open to ideas. I have tried to demonstrate that the budget papers are different this year, for that very reason. I have been working with the department. I want to present that this is the appropriate, responsible way of doing things, and that is what I am

attempting to do. It still seems to be not quite hitting the mark for everyone, so I am open to those continued conversations.

David DAVIS: I am happy to put on record my thanks to the minister for that and her openness on discussion on this. As I say, the centre for integrity and others are looking at a lot of these matters, and I thank Mr Limbrick for the forum he ran at Parliament recently on some of these exact and related matters. But let me just move to another example here. This would be on page 32, relating to contingency releases. This is still schedule 3, so we are still doing the Treasurer's advances from 2023–24. For example, here there is a 'Level crossing removal program' allocation of \$2.195 billion; it is a hell of a lot of money. I ask the minister: what is that for? Yes, it is for the level crossing removal program, I get that, but what is it for – which crossings? And there is a further, deeper question, and I have asked her before in this chamber about completed projects. I think there are 88 crossings that have been completed now, and we still do not have a completion cost on any of them – not one. I would have thought where there are completed crossings, perhaps with the effluxion of a certain period of time, that the actual final cost could be known. Many of them have blown out massively, and I think that is a point that the public are entitled to know, that taxpayers are entitled to know. But on this, what is the \$2.195 billion, and does it relate to completed crossings, continuing crossings – what?

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to this particular item, Mr Davis, it is likely that the TEI has not changed, and that would have been potentially made public. These will be milestone payments – 100 per cent, that is what these will be – in relation to again that releasing of the funding when certain parts of the project have been met. They are reported in other ways, is my understanding, but this contingency will definitely be released as milestones, and all of these are certainly subject to our requirements under the high-value, high-risk framework.

David DAVIS: I just make a point – and I do not hold the Treasurer responsible personally for this – the crossing programs and the high-risk, high-value payments have generally not constrained the cost blowouts in this particular program. But my other point is: with these crossings, many of them – 88 I think is the number that have been completed – is there an intention on the government's part to eventually, at some time, release the cost of the completed crossings?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, you talked about cost blowouts. I would refute the accuracy of that comment in relation to level crossing removals. Again, there is an annual contingency release for the level crossing program; that has been happening for some years. In relation to the reporting and how it is broken down, I think I would have to get advice or direct you to Minister Williams.

David DAVIS: Perhaps the minister can take this on notice. What would be helpful for the chamber and for the community would be for the 88 completed crossings to have a conclusion of the cost of each of those. I get that if they are done in a pair or a triplet there would be a cost across that arrangement. No, it is not easily trackable in there. There were two big level crossing program tranches; there has never been a full reconciliation across them that you can track in the budget. Trust me, I have tried and have had other people try for me. If you are fearing that I might be a dunderhead and not able to understand it, I have had numerous others try, and nobody can track the cost, the money. You pick a level crossing at Toorak Road – that is one that is on its own; it is a single crossing. How much was that meant to cost? Yes, you can get the figure out there when the tender went out, but nobody can tell me what the cost of the Toorak Road level crossing was. I am just picking that as an example. It has been completed now for some years, but nobody can tell me what the cost of that was. And the government must know – Treasury must know, because as you correctly say, Treasury has let the money out in tranches.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is not for me particularly to take on notice questions that should be answered by other ministers. It might be difficult to break some of them down by individual project, because some of them are grouped together as individual tenders and the like. There is probably greater capacity to do the full tender things as opposed to the individual projects, because that would probably be a matter for the delivery agencies in relation to it, because they can buy all of the concrete in one

lot and not necessarily be able to allocate it by cost per each project. So it might be difficult to do each project. What I can do is ensure that your views and comments are passed on to Minister Williams in relation to any greater transparency that she can provide in relation to the cost of individual projects.

David DAVIS: That is the furthest I have got on this matter, ever. Nobody has ever, including the Premier when she was the minister, provided the slightest bit of information about the cost of any completed project, and I think this applies more generally.

Jaclyn Symes: We are proud of these projects.

David DAVIS: Well, if you were proud, you would probably be prepared to tell us the numbers. My view is that the first tranche of crossings blew out massively and there was a cross-subsidy from the second tranche, and we have never been able to unscramble that omelette. In that sense, nobody has ever been able to get to the bottom of the actual cost per crossing or even per line or per project or whatever. However, that is probably enough on that. I thank you.

The next question I had related to Helen Silver and her review. We asked a question of you about that yesterday, and you have given us a bit more information. The report will come at the end of June. The government is intending to put a response with that. What was not quite clear is when that would come out into the public domain. Perhaps you might want to give us some better indication of that.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not in a position to give you a specific date. The reason I cannot do that is that, although I meet regularly with Ms Silver, I do not know what is going to be in her independent report. Therefore it is a little difficult for me to pre-empt how long it is going to take to develop a government response. But I will say to you exactly what I have said to the media, who have asked the exact same question, which is that everyone will know that I have got it, and it will not be my intention to have to defend sitting on a report that people want to see. It is my intention to make sure that the response and the report are made public in a timely fashion. But again, I am just not prepared to give you a date because I do not want to get caught out and it being said that I have not released something by a couple of days or something like that. I am not talking six months in any way, shape or form. In fact I am hoping that her report will inform the budget update, for example. Maybe that gives you an indication of my intentions.

David DAVIS: I understand what the minister is saying. She does not want to get caught on a precise trip date, and I can completely relate to that. Notwithstanding that and notwithstanding your point that there will be an impact on the budget update, as I understand it, this report, or its iterations, its progress, has already had an effect on the budget. I think that you have had input from Ms Silver already and that it has helped in the framing of the budget. Could you enumerate exactly how and what we can see in the budget from the Silver input, if I can put it that way?

Jaclyn SYMES: As indicated when I made the announcement about asking Ms Silver to do this work, she did present some initial findings part way through her work, which was able to inform some of the budget-saving measures that were booked in this year's budget. A lot of that work was done in collaboration with departments in relation to some of the thinking that they had been doing that she could pick up and have a look at and reaffirm, for example. There is around \$3.3 billion worth of savings. Some of that is informed by Helen's work, but not all of it.

David DAVIS: Given that it has been implemented in part in the budget, is it possible to have a list of those items that have been, as it were, actioned or partially actioned already?

Jaclyn SYMES: There was never a commitment to make those findings public. They were delivered in a paper I think –

David DAVIS: A presentation.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, not part of a report. It was not an interim report; it was interim findings, if that makes sense, which will be rolled into her final report. The totality of her advice will be in her

final report. It is not as though the interim findings are a separate process. They form her final report. It was just some early things that could be identified that we were able to book.

David DAVIS: I thank the minister for that elucidation. With the Silver material, is she being supported by others in this process? Who is supporting her in this particular process? Is it the secretariat, is it part of Treasury, is it part of Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC)? What is it?

Jaclyn SYMES: They are questions that are probably best put to Ms Silver herself because it is an independent review. But there have been some seconded positions from within government, including from DTF and DPC. In relation to who she has engaged, that is predominantly a matter –

David DAVIS: What number? Half a dozen?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have the details of how many people she has engaged. We will obviously disclose all of that in due course because that is fine.

David DAVIS: We will look forward to that point. I wanted to talk about some of the sensitivities that are analysed in the budget, and I asked a question around these matters earlier. The sensitivity analysis at the back of budget paper 2, I think from memory, lays out the sort of impact of a 1 per cent change in certain interest rate parameters and a range of other points. One of the questions I asked yesterday was around the impact of energy. It is actually quite a serious point – and I referenced an earlier comment in the budget paper in that supplementary. I am just interested to understand what analysis has been undertaken about energy costs on one hand and interruption of supply on the other – the lack of reliability of supply on the other. Have they been really formally, carefully analysed in the sensitivity sense?

Jaclyn SYMES: I offered to get you more advice on the sensitivities analysis, Mr Davis, but I think when it comes to things such as interest rate changes, that is certainly factored in. Inflationary factors are factored in, and I would put energy costs very much in that inflation space.

David DAVIS: It is just one that you put into that inflation.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is my understanding.

David DAVIS: In terms of the Commonwealth contributions, which are a large input into the budget –

Jaclyn SYMES: Grants.

David DAVIS: Grants of various types – I am not going to break them down; I could go for a while. My question is: is the government looking at an aggregate outcome for the state from the Commonwealth government? For example, our GST share improved. It has historically for a long period been quite low –

Jaclyn SYMES: It has.

David DAVIS: This is a point of bipartisanship, I think. In fact now it has come up to not far from par, but that is only one –

Jaclyn SYMES: It has not fixed the historical –

David DAVIS: No, not the losses that the state has suffered over 125 years. But the other streams – is there an attempt to aggregate this and look at this as a share overall for the state? Is this done? To say, ‘Well, look, we’re about 25 per cent of the economy nationally. Do we get about 25 per cent of overall federal government grants or not?’

Jaclyn SYMES: No, we do not. We have seen some improvements in recent times – that is certainly acknowledged. I hope that we have continued productive conversations with the federal government in ensuring that we can get better outcomes that reflect our population in a range of

matters. I think in infrastructure we are certainly underdone – we continue to be underdone. Obviously the federal budget recently, in relation to some of the Sunshine hub and some roads announcements, is starting to see improvements there, but we are still short-changed as compared to other states, particularly New South Wales, and certainly we would ask for that to be rectified at some point. There are a number of bilateral agreements that are currently in discussion, whether it is education, health or disability. There is a range of these that we are continuing conversations on and looking to get the best deal possible for Victoria. I put at the outset – not at the expense of other states. That is not necessarily our intention, but we have been underfunded comparative to others for a very long time, and we do point that out.

David DAVIS: I accept what the minister said. Has there been some attempt to aggregate that, as it were, and say, ‘For Commonwealth grant funding of all types we get 17 per cent’ or whatever?

Jaclyn SYMES: Definitely in infrastructure, yes.

David DAVIS: No. I mean an aggregate figure. You are not sure? Maybe it has.

Jaclyn SYMES: On budget paper 5, page 7, we have got the forecast of Commonwealth grants, which puts out what we would expect. In relation to deducing from that our fair share, we consistently receive the lowest per capita nationally in almost every metric, which in one sense demonstrates that we are pretty good at looking after ourselves, but they are constant conversations for nearly every minister with their federal colleagues in relation to attracting the investment that we think Victoria deserves.

David DAVIS: I think what you are telling me is that we can look program by program, but there has not been any attempt to aggregate that up into an overall outcome for the state. It seems to me it would be very useful for the state.

Jaclyn SYMES: Budget paper 2, page 47, has got a graph that is quite useful. This is a good indicator of the interstate comparisons, which certainly demonstrates that we are behind in that regard.

David DAVIS: Yes, Tassie. The predictable ones are better in the dark colours. This is on page 47, box 4.1.

Jaclyn SYMES: Correct. For *Hansard*, we are in budget paper 2, chapter 4, page 47, looking at a table of interstate comparisons of state government revenue.

David DAVIS: That is recording that we receive the least revenue per capita of all states – a trend which has persisted over the last 10 years, and I think even longer than that. The amount we receive is 5 per cent less than New South Wales and 20 per cent less than Queensland. You have mentioned some steps that are being taken to remedy that by individual ministers. Is there a statewide approach to trying to remedy that?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is certainly a conversation that the Premier and I have, yes.

David DAVIS: I also wanted to ask the Treasurer about the process of forming the budget with the Silver input. Has there been discussion about the final numbers in the public sector? There are suggestions in the budget, but that is not the final Silver report. Do we know what number of public sector employees are likely to be retrenched, for example, or some other mechanism? It seems, from what I intuit and what I hear, that the Silver report will recommend a substantial reduction in public sector employees. Is that correct, and do you have a number?

Jaclyn SYMES: First of all, it has not been a secret that the work that I have asked Ms Silver to do will result in a reduction of full-time equivalent across the Victorian public sector and their agencies. What I set her a goal of was reducing the VPS to the share of the economy it was in pre-pandemic times. In relation to the interim findings and what was identified in the budget – and it effectively explains why there is not granular detail in there – there are around 1200 positions that are included in the \$3.3 billion of savings in this year’s budget. Obviously it was not our intention to telegraph to

people through a budget process that their positions may no longer be there. There are obviously appropriate industrial relations and human resources processes to go underway. What I would say is that the departments have been working for some time in relation to identifying their own duplication and opportunities for collapsing programs and the like. There are a range of vacancies that have not been filled as well, because everyone knew that the expectation was to slow down recruitment with a view to reversing the number of VPS both internally and in agencies. The specific term of reference was to look at reducing FTE across the board. In relation to the final numbers in her report, I will await that report.

David DAVIS: Treasurer, does the budget contain a contingency for redundancies?

Jaclyn SYMES: The answer is yes. But I would also bring to your attention that we have already had a series of early retirement invitations and some redundancies across the public service in the last couple of years. So we already have a central way to deal with the financial implications and to fund redundancies and the like. There is an existing bucket. This year's budget contains a contingency to add to that.

David DAVIS: The last set of figures I saw were the budget outcomes report from PAEC, which actually showed the public sector had grown by 59 employees. It is a very small number, but that was not a reduction, it was actually an increase. And what I would be very cautious about here is: what process does the government have to ensure that good key people are not lost in this process? I am perhaps more cautious in this than many and more concerned to see the quality of the public service is protected. I think there can be blunt instruments that do not assist and actually can be counterproductive in certain circumstances. I guess what I am asking is what steps the government will take if this is the process it is going to go down, and I am not necessarily endorsing that or otherwise. What are the protections for the quality of the public service being preserved?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, I just want to put the 59 employees into context. Yes, you are right. It is a tiny increase when you compare it to the fact that there are 55,000 in VPS or 260,000 in the wider public sector. A lot of those increases would be attributed to health, education, justice and frontline services. Core frontline workers have been excluded from the Helen Silver review. I accept what you have said in relation to wanting to ensure you have got the best and brightest people in the public service and you do not want reductions to be attractive to those people; you want to retain them. Part of the Silver review is not just reducing the number of people, it is about bringing in efficiencies. It is about making sure that the Victorian public sector is the best it can be. It has a great reputation around Australia as having really good people. We do want to keep those people; in fact we want to make their jobs rewarding and want to reduce some of the bureaucratic processes that tie them up. There is a lot of frustration in duplication.

When you have got so many layers in the public sector, the number of steps that you have to take to achieve what you want to achieve can be frustrating. Secretaries and agency heads will certainly be working through these types of issues very carefully, and I guess that is about as far as I can go in relation to that at this point in time. With my industrial relations hat on, first of all, I want to make sure that anybody whose position is no longer available is treated fairly, with empathy and has opportunities to perhaps identify other opportunities in the public sector – that is certainly something that I stand by. But in relation to keeping the best and brightest, we want to keep the best and brightest by having the best public service in the country.

David DAVIS: And protecting frontline services. I am almost done. I want to come back to these major project issues. There is an enormous amount still being spent on major projects. I understand your desire to reduce it and so forth, but a key question is the quality of the outcomes and the value for money. I understand the high-risk, high-value processes, but it seems to me, Treasurer – and I am not holding you personally responsible for this; much of this happened before your time – that almost every single major project is over budget and in some cases massively over budget. What is the government doing more generally to try and wrestle with this problem and deal with these cost

blowouts? Because it is going straight onto the state's bottom line – it is debt. Perhaps you would like to give us your prescription.

Jaclyn SYMES: There is a little bit in that. At the outset I do not necessarily accept the premise of the question. It is undoubtable that around the world projects are costing more. The cost escalation in relation to materials, particularly after COVID, impacted every major infrastructure project. Labour shortages have an impact in relation to that as well. Some of the –

David DAVIS: These blowouts started well before that. We can talk about level crossings before that. That was well before we got to COVID or anything.

Jaclyn SYMES: But as I said, I do not necessarily accept your proposition that there have been cost blowouts in that program. But again, I will leave that for discussions with the relevant minister. Some of the measures that we do take – obviously you have identified the high-value, high-risk framework, which is all about ensuring that you are asking people to meet milestones so you can keep an eye on the project as it is going ahead. The changes to the Financial Management Act 1994 are all about ensuring that agencies and departments can start to red-flag any issues in relation to programs that they have delivered or budgets that they are not meeting, so that we can get in and make sure that we can see what is going on there.

I would come back to the importance of investing in infrastructure. Thank you for acknowledging that we are on a trajectory of reducing our infrastructure expenditure. That is an appropriate thing to do.

David DAVIS: We'll see if it's true yet. But where in the –

Jaclyn SYMES: It is in my aggregates that the infrastructure spend will come down. But I do not shy away from being pretty proud about being a government that has made investment in productive infrastructure. That is about ensuring economic growth. We have got Metro Tunnel, West Gate Tunnel, Footscray Hospital – these are generational projects that are good for people now and will be setting us up for the future. It will ensure that the economy continues to grow. It addresses population growth. Has it contributed to debt? Yes, it has, but productive infrastructure is something that responsible governments should invest in.

What we have done has been very aggressive in that regard, because we have had a lot of catching up to do. I understand that. That is why we are reducing our public sector spend on infrastructure. It gives an opportunity for the private sector to also come in and pick up a lot of the skills in relation to the power of construction work that has been going on in the state of Victoria for the last eight years or so. There are other opportunities for us to ensure that we have accountability and discipline in the expenditure of projects through public-private partnerships and different contracting arrangements and the like. So there are a range of measures to make sure that costs are kept within the forecasts that are set at the time. But again, we want to make sure that we are always continuing to make those appropriate, responsible investments, because it in turn is the best outcome for the state of Victoria.

David DAVIS: I am not sure I am assuaged in terms of feeling that the government has a tight, sharp plan to rein in some of these cost blowouts or has an understanding of the scale of the problem that the government faces. But in the interests of time I will just confine my set of questions now to one project, and that is the Suburban Rail Loop, and I do that because of its scale. The business and investment case suggests that it will be somewhere just south of \$35 billion. I think the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) assessments are vastly higher than that. With construction costs and the general cost of construction inputs going up right across the scheme – and Mr Welch made commentary in this regard at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings – it seems to me, Treasurer, that what we have not seen from the government is an update on the true cost of the Suburban Rail Loop. Even on those modest estimates in the order of 20 per cent in construction costs increases, this would undoubtedly flow through to the Suburban Rail Loop. In that sense, can you provide the committee today with a clearer position of the true cost of the proposed Suburban Rail Loop?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, I note your interest in this particular project and that you want to focus on that, and that is fine. We can have a conversation about that. I just want to do some opening remarks in relation to where you have gone. It is frustrating that I was unable to convince you that the profile of our government infrastructure investment is moderating, because that is clearly what has been put in the budget papers. It is in the aggregates, and it is what I spoke to the ratings agencies about. I have a firm commitment to reducing our expenditure on infrastructure, but not at the expense of projects. We look at it more as a program of infrastructure, as opposed to individual projects. That is why our aggregates look at the total costs of infrastructure and can demonstrate that they are moderating. In relation to the costings that you have talked about, yes, the project is expected to cost between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion. You referenced the PBO and their estimates being significantly higher. I do not think that that is the advice I have. I have got that they reported that the cost to build SRL East will be \$32.8 billion from 2019 to 2025, so that seems to be pretty much smack bang in the middle of what our estimates were anyway. In relation to any further updates in relation to that, I can only confirm that the position is unchanged.

David DAVIS: I think what the Treasurer is trying to tell us is that despite all of the infrastructure costs around the nation – in our own state and around the nation – having gone up significantly since the estimates were made in the so-called business and investment case for the Suburban Rail Loop East, there has been no change in those costs. Is that what you are saying? I do not believe you, if that is what you are saying. But if you are saying it, there is not much I can do about that.

Jaclyn SYMES: Perhaps it would be useful to point out, Mr Davis, that to date, all SRL contracts have been awarded within existing budgets, and on the points that you are making in relation to cost escalations, inflationary pressures et cetera, these are what are built into contingencies of projects of this size and duration.

David DAVIS: What you are saying is all of the costs to date have been within contingency and that the government has no reason to believe that the future costs will be outside the envelope of the contingency. Is that what you are telling me?

Jaclyn SYMES: The answer to your question, Mr Davis, is yes. The delivery agency will continue to monitor market conditions, but the answer is yes.

David DAVIS: My colleague has handed me a note to say if you are quite so certain on the cost, why isn't that in the budget? What is next year's cost for spending for the Suburban Rail Loop?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, as you would appreciate, funding for this project has been provided in previous budgets. There is not a new allocation in this budget, but that is not to say that there will not be money in the 2025–26 year that is expended. I am not in a position to give you a specific amount.

David DAVIS: Can you give me a ballpark?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am also reluctant to do that because there are obviously potential tender packages and the like that are on foot.

David DAVIS: Tens of millions? Hundreds of millions?

Jaclyn SYMES: No, more than that.

David DAVIS: Billions?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes.

David DAVIS: Single billions or tens of billions?

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me take it on notice and see what I can get you. I do not have a problem with you finding out the figure of what goes to SRL this year, but I am not in a position to give you an indication at this point in time, given the sensitivities of the tenders or any of the other contracts and things. But let me take it on notice.

David DAVIS: The other point that I wanted to ask around the SRL in particular relates to the input funding streams. The government has made a great deal of the fact that it is a third, a third, a third – roughly \$12 billion of state money; roughly \$12 billion, or \$11.5 billion of federal money; and something similar of value capture. I just want to come to those buckets one by one, beginning with the value capture one. Every expert around the land that I speak to – some do not believe that, but I was talking to people who are knowledgeable on value capture long, long before this government was talking about value capture – none of them think that that figure is realistic, even over many decades. In that circumstance it looks to me like there is a hole in the government's funding source there. Is the government intending to produce a schedule or an estimate of money that is provided through this value capture mechanism over time? When will that money start to flow, and of what will it be comprised?

Jaclyn SYMES: We all have the benefit of Ms Shing talking about these issues on a regular basis, often at the invitation of you, Mr Davis. It is without doubt that new train stations or a train line will bring new businesses, new homes and new shops. We anticipate – and I do not think many people would disagree – that SRL precincts will be highly attractive places to invest, whether it is through businesses or commercial property. We expect that because of that, the value of those will be significantly enhanced because of that project. Value capture is not a unique concept and is used to deliver and fund a range of infrastructure projects. We do expect that those that financially benefit are in a position to contribute. There is more work to do in relation to the value capture opportunities, and I am sure that more information can be released as that work progresses.

David DAVIS: It seems to me there are a number of mechanisms of value capture. You can levy via a land tax or something on people's rates – that seems to have been counted out. It might have been when I wrote to tens of thousands of people and suggested they were about to get a land tax put on them.

Jaclyn SYMES: Did you?

David DAVIS: I did. I wrote to about 80,000 people, and nobody seemed to be very keen. I do not think I had a single person say they wanted to pay more.

Jaclyn SYMES: You don't often find that, do you?

David DAVIS: No, you don't often find that. The former Premier seemed to change his view on that, but leaving that aside, that seems to have been counted out. But what has not been counted out is higher levies or rates for businesses. That is on, and I wonder if you might tell me what that might be. How much? What sort of number? You know, a business that is paying \$10,000 in council rates now, what will they pay? Or is it on their land tax forms? Is that how it is to be done?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I indicated in my answer to your question before, these are matters that are evolving. As you have indicated, it is not the government's intention for existing home owners to contribute to the value capture, but for those people that endeavour to make large profits from this project, it would be an expectation that they contribute.

David DAVIS: Okay. So that is one source. The other is the value uplift that happens where a planning change occurs. So the windfall gains is one tax that will be collected on the Suburban Rail Loop – is that the intention?

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, windfall gains tax already applies to planning changes.

David DAVIS: This would be a special zone.

Jaclyn SYMES: I have got no announcement in relation to any special zones.

David DAVIS: So the Suburban Rail Loop rules apply to planning arrangements – 1.6-kilometre radius from the rail hub. Will the windfall gains tax apply in all of that region?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, just at first principles, value capture initiatives will accrue over many, many years – decades. In relation to the specific question about windfall gains tax and where it applies, it applies at the moment when you have a change to a planning scheme.

David DAVIS: Other than a growth areas infrastructure contribution area?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, correct, other than a GAIC area. So that is the existing framework, and there is no change at this point in time.

David DAVIS: So the answer is yes, it will apply in those zones.

Jaclyn SYMES: It currently does, yes.

David DAVIS: So there will be no other development levy or uplift levy that is applied, especially in these zones, on top of the windfall gain?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not in a position to go any further than the conversation we have gone to in relation to development of value capture ideas. There are a lot of suggestions – if you have got any, you are welcome to feed them in – but there are no announcements in relation to that.

David DAVIS: One we heard about this week was the congestion levy. Will that apply in these zones? That is a new one for these zones – is that intended?

Jaclyn SYMES: We are very much straying outside the bill. As I said, I did invite general questions and in good faith have attempted to answer them. But what you are now asking me about is potential future policy.

David DAVIS: All right. I will take the indication but ask one further question on that matter: is there any allowance in this year's budget for a collection of value capture for the Suburban Rail Loop? Is there any line item? Is there an amount, or is it zero? It might be land sales, for example.

Jaclyn SYMES: Apologies for the delay, Mr Davis. I think the best way to answer this would be to draw your attention to budget paper 4, page 19, which has a breakout box for the Suburban Rail Loop, and in particular identifies that in relation to value capture, saying:

Mechanisms will include harnessing existing tax revenue collected within the precincts, along with additional measures to be progressed for detailed design and implementation.

You would appreciate I am not in a position to go into any greater detail than that.

David DAVIS: The conclusion is there is no additional collection. It says:

Mechanisms will include harnessing existing tax revenue collected within the precincts, along with additional measures to be progressed for detailed design and implementation.

The government is spending quite fast on this at the moment – some billions per year, or a billion-plus per year. When does it expect to start to receive some revenue from this value capture process?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, Mr Davis, this is ongoing work, and I refer you to the budget papers.

David DAVIS: I will leave the value capture matter alone and just return to the Commonwealth funding. Is the state government expecting – does it have reason, or has it had communication with the Commonwealth that would lead it to believe – it is going to receive \$10 billion or \$12 billion in additional funding?

Jaclyn SYMES: I can draw your attention to the initial investment from the federal government of \$2.2 billion for this project, which is quite a lot of money. If you are investing \$2.2 billion in a project, I think you have some views that that project is worthy of investment. I would point to some federal minister's comments, particularly Catherine King's, who has described the SRL as a transformational project for Victoria. We have got Clare O'Neil as the federal Minister for Housing – she is enthusiastic about the SRL because it will deliver 70,000 homes right where Victorians can benefit from them

being close to train stations, services and jobs. Coming back to the conversation that we had earlier about receiving our fair share from the Commonwealth, in this year's Commonwealth budget we received 21.4 per cent in infrastructure funding over five years compared to our population share of 25.8 per cent. So there is the argument that there should be some funding afforded to infrastructure in Victoria. I do expect that the Commonwealth will continue their positive partnership on this project.

David DAVIS: But, Treasurer, there is no immediate sign of a \$10 billion cheque being written out to backfill this Commonwealth gap.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think what is important to note also, Mr Davis, is that the contracts signed to date are within the first third of approved state funding, so we are getting on with the project and we will continue the conversations with our federal colleagues.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 10 agreed to; schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (16:02): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (16:02): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025

Assembly's amendments

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (16:03): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly returns to the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024**, the **Duties Act 2000**, the **First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000**, the **Land Tax Act 2005**, the **Payroll Tax Act 2007**, the **Taxation Administration Act 1997**, the **Unclaimed Money Act 2008** and the **Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972** and for other purposes' and informs the Council that the Assembly has made the suggested amendments with which agreement is requested.

Amendments as follows:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 16 –

'16A Exemption continues if land becomes unfit for occupation

In section 58(2) of the **Land Tax Act 2005**, for "second" substitute "fourth".

2. Clause 24, lines 14 and 15, omit “12 months but less than 3 years” and insert “the prescribed period or, if no period is prescribed, any period,”.
3. Clause 24, after line 15 insert –
‘(2A) After section 70F(2) of the **Land Tax Act 2005** insert –
“(2A) The period (if any) prescribed for the purposes of subsection (2) must not exceed 12 months.”’.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (16:04): I move:

That the message be referred to the committee of the whole forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Committed.

Committee

Resumed.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The committee will now deal with the postponed clauses to which amendments were suggested by the Council. The Assembly have notified by message that they have agreed to make the amendments suggested by the Council.

Postponed new clause further considered (16:05)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is:

That new clause 16A, as inserted by the Assembly on the suggestion of the Council, stand part of the bill.

New clause agreed to.

Postponed clause 24 further considered (16:06)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is:

That clause 24, as amended by the Assembly on the suggestion of the Council, stand part of the bill.

Amended clause agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments made by the Assembly on the suggestion of the Council, without further amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (16:06): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (16:06): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill, including the amendments made by the Assembly on the suggestion of the Council, without further amendment.

Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gayle Tierney:

That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:07): I am pleased to make a contribution to the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. Noting the work that the Parliament does, I want to take the opportunity to put on record my thanks to many in this place, whether they be attendants or the grounds staff or the clerks or the kitchen staff, the whole sweep of people through this place that make it function. I want to put on record my personal thanks, and on behalf of others in this chamber, for the work that they have done.

The increase in spending is modest. Look at schedule 1 here and you will see there is a modest increase in a number of departments, but the Legislative Council seems to have done better than it has in some other years. The Parliamentary Budget Office has got increases and parliamentary services more generally. I think the task of appropriating these amounts is important, particularly in the sense that the Auditor-General, Integrity Oversight Victoria, the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Ombudsman are all appropriated through the appropriation Parliament bill. What is important in this is for us to look carefully at what appropriations are made and to ensure these bodies are appropriately auspiced and appropriately funded.

I am going to make some reflections on some of these. I think the Auditor's funding has not been particularly generous, and given the scale of work that the Auditor does and the importance of the Auditor-General to Victoria, I would have thought that there was a significant case for this amount of money. It goes from \$19.617 million to \$20.419 million, which is a very modest increase in funding. I also think this is true with the Parliamentary Budget Office; there are modest increases there only. I particularly think these independent agencies that have oversight over government have got a great importance.

I am interested in the allocation that is made to the Assembly. It might be that a government member wants to look and see the very large additional allocation made to the Assembly. There may be some explanation for that. Have a look on page 6 at schedule 1, and you will look at this with a certain surprise. I would be happy to understand what that is. It might be that that relates to some of the important work that relates to new members coming in and new offices. I am happy to be convinced if that is the case.

Looking at the funding for investigatory committees and knowing the scale of the work that Legislative Council investigatory committees are doing, it seems to me that that is not a substantial increase in funding.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: Have a look at the schedule yourself. You will see the funding for last year and the funding for the year ahead, and you can make some comparisons and some conclusions on those matters. What I really want to say, though, is that independent oversight is important. It is important that the bill goes through in that way. I am happy to support this particular bill.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:12): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. As we have heard already, this bill authorises payments from the consolidated fund to the Parliament and its agencies for the upcoming financial year. Importantly, this bill provides funding for the various independent oversight and integrity agencies that monitor the activities of the

government and its various departments. The recently tabled report *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2022/23* from the Integrity and Oversight Committee details concerns with delays in the time taken by some of Victoria's integrity agencies in responding to complaints. Furthermore, the Ombudsman raised concerns about relying on ad hoc Treasurer's advances to top up their budget when they receive parliamentary referrals for inquiries which require them to hire additional staff. Hiring and training capable staff for episodic inquiries is difficult and disruptive.

Currently the Treasurer is responsible for deciding the funding of Victoria's independent officers, such as the Ombudsman and IBAC Commissioner. Integrity agencies are responsible for investigating complaints about the government and its departments, upon which they also rely for funding. This funding structure creates a bidirectional conflict of interest: an agency may be nervous about antagonising the government which funds it, and governments feeling irritated by an agency may be less inclined to support its budgetary requests. One way to prevent this is to have an independent body make funding decisions for integrity agencies. In 2022 the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, the Ombudsman and IBAC jointly called for the creation of an independent statutory commission or tribunal for this exact purpose, and in their latest report the Integrity and Oversight Committee recommended that the government have another look at that very recommendation.

If the decision must be made by a government, at least publishing the agency budget bid along with the final amount funded in the budget would allow public scrutiny, making it harder for competing interests to influence funding. The New South Wales Parliament recently legislated a system which provides transparency and oversight while still allowing the government to determine the funding amount. Their Treasurer is required to write to the head of each integrity agency with the amount to be appropriated for that agency. They must also notify the relevant parliamentary oversight committee, which must review and report back to the Treasurer and Parliament, and the Treasurer must then respond. In addition, there is a special unit within Treasury to liaise with the integrity agencies, and they are excluded from efficiency dividends required by the Premier's department and the cabinet office. In other words, New South Wales has clearly given this much thought and devised a way of reducing the conflict of interest present when agencies responsible for scrutiny of government also depend on them for funding. Victoria is once again the national laggard on government integrity and should either set up an independent body or adopt the New South Wales system. It is disappointing to see that the government has not taken on these reforms, and I hope that in 12 months time when this bill is debated again I can congratulate them on making these changes.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:15): I also rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025, and in doing so acknowledge that I believe this is the third year in a row now that I have spoken on this particular theme of bill. I always greatly enjoy being able to give a contribution on this bill, first and foremost because it does give us the opportunity to acknowledge and thank all the amazing staff that help us to do the jobs that we are here to do, that help us to represent our constituents and that do it so ably. It would not be possible without the very many extensive supports that they provide us. There are many important things which are funded through this bill. It is not just the Parliament itself; as both previous speakers have referred to, it is also those important integrity agencies – integrity agencies which I do note have had their funding increased again this year as they have had for every year at least of this government. They have had those funding allocations increased.

There are some further resources and support provided for various other things too. I note Mr Davis's interest in parliamentary investigatory committees. Indeed they have seen an increase in the allocation of support for them. And whilst Mr Davis might despair at the support that we are providing for the Legislative Assembly, even though we do now have a Treasurer in the Legislative Council we should nevertheless not neglect our friends across the hall and we should still give them something – give them something, Mr McCracken. Of course we know which chamber is all the more important, and many of our activities too are supported through that. Indeed across the board all of these very important democratic legislative integrity and accountability functions are funded through the

appropriation of Parliament bill. We do see each of those line items, as Mr Davis was referring to, in the schedule of the bill, each of them continuing to be well resourced and indeed continuing to receive modest or substantial increases across every line item.

It is the chambers themselves, it is the investigatory committees and it is the integrity agencies, whether it be the Victorian Auditor-General's Office or the Parliamentary Budget Office or many others as well, whose resources and whose work are supported through this bill. It also provides the funding for all of the many wonderful electorate officer staff that we each have and the staff that we employ to support us and to support our constituents. I would like to acknowledge all my team, who work very hard as well. And I would also like to acknowledge the parliamentary staff in this place, whose expertise is unsurpassed and whose support and commitment is unwavering, including the chamber clerks in with us today. We also have a great deal many other staff that make this place work outside of the two relevant departments of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly.

We also have our Department of Parliamentary Services staff covering the wide range of services that this Parliament undertakes, whether it is our security support officers; whether it is our great teams at Hansard and at broadcasting, who have to sit through all of our speeches and make some sort of sense of them; whether it is the support from the building and grounds staff or indeed the catering staff, who always do great work as well; or whether it is the property team. Last year I made reference to the fact that I was at the time without an electorate office, and as it so happens I still am out of an electorate office, which is unfortunate. However, that is not through any fault or lack of effort from the property services team, and I would like to acknowledge them in particular, having had the opportunity to work with them over the past 12 months, for their continued support and search to support my team to be able to do its job as best as it can. And I would like to appreciate Amy and Deb as well as the team in the new projects team as well, including Spencer, for all their very hard work in getting us into an office again, which we very much look forward to.

I mentioned catering staff. Of course it would not be a sitting week in this place without a huge array of events in different parts of this precinct and in this relatively small building that gets very, very full very quickly. Indeed I had firsthand experience of that myself this week in trying to find a room for a launch event for a parliamentary friendship group, the Parliamentary Friends of France, which we actually launched on Tuesday night. It was a very exciting event to be a part of, bringing in a number of impressive people, including the consul general, the ambassador, many business stakeholders, and of course we also had some incredible sponsors. We had some very special awards presented to two Victorians who have done excellent work in the space of French cuisine, that being Kate Reid, the director of Lune Croissanterie, and Annie Smithers, the head chef at du Fermier in Trentham, both incredibly well regarded in their field and well beyond. They are both well regarded in Victoria, across the country and across the world, and we saw very appropriate recognition of their contributions through the award of the *mérite agricole*, which is the French agricultural order of merit, presented to both Annie and to Kate by the French ambassador to Australia. It was a very special occasion, and we were able to have some French catering for the event as well, which made the event very appropriate and, as I understand, very popular among members and staff.

I say this, and I make this point as well, because none of this would have been possible without the immense work of our catering team. I would like to particularly thank Mary-Dee Morgan for all her work in facilitating that and all the various demands that were placed upon her. I very much note that it has been a very busy week and continues to be, not just in the very important work that we do here but in the showcasing, whether it be of the great work that the Brotherhood of St Laurence does in Queen's Hall, which is on demonstration right now, whether it is the very important launch of LGBTIQ+ workplace guidelines in the south library this morning or whether it is building those important relationships with stakeholders in Victoria and overseas, such as the launch of the French event this week.

We also had an event today in the Legislative Council committee room which was bittersweet for me, actually, in some way. A few weeks ago, prior to the A-League grand final, working with Melbourne

Victory Football Club and as proud co-convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of Melbourne Victory Football Club, I booked out the Legislative Council committee room in the hope that if the club were to win the grand final, we would have an event here. The club, very graciously, before the grand final had even begun, said, 'Look, if we don't win, we are playing Melbourne City, so they can have it,' in a spirit of bipartisanship that is worthy of the Legislative Council itself, I think. As it so happened and as it so transpired, perhaps sadly for me and other fellow Victory fans, that was what happened. City did have a very well deserved win, and so we had a very good event today, a wonderful event actually, in the Legislative Council committee room. The member for Cranbourne was particularly excited to gloat to me about the result and wave her scarf in my face, but that is just part and parcel of these very passionate but very worthy rivalries.

It was indeed a great event and a great acknowledgement of the incredible work that City in the Community do as well. We had a bunch of school students in from the south-east, from different schools, at programs where Melbourne City does some incredible work. I will give full credit to the club, including to managing director Brad Rowse but also Sunil and George, who I have had the pleasure of working with over a long period of time at the club. They run the City in the Community program, and it is an absolutely splendid program, one that really engages professional football big leagues with kids and students in my region, including some of the more disadvantaged pockets of my region, which makes it all the more special – and all the more special to have them in the Parliament today. That is exactly the sort of event that really makes this place such a showcase, not just for us as MPs but for all Victorians. The examples I have listed are just a few of the events that have been on this week. None of that work could be done without people like Mary-Dee and the rest of the catering team, including Jacquie and all her staff. Without their work we would not be able to do any of that, especially in what is a very beautiful, historic and awe-inspiring building but one that is very old and presents many challenges in terms of space and maintenance, again going back to the building and grounds staff and the projects team who do a lot of work to keep this whole show running. Whilst the whips are running our chamber excellently, we have the building and grounds team managing the building and everything around it.

This bill is an opportunity to speak about all of the wonderful things that our parliamentary staff do. I will make a brief note of the fact that in the Parliament of Victoria this week we are very lucky to have a delegation of Fijian MPs who have come to visit us. They met with those of us on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week. It was wonderful to have them join us and for them to see our Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in its full glory, would you say, Mr Welch? PAEC at its full glory? I am struggling to find the right word that encapsulates the spirit of it. The full vim and verve of PAEC – that was the phrase that came up in PAEC last week – as Minister Pearson so eloquently put to us; they got to be part of that as well.

The relationships we have with the parliaments of Tuvalu, Nauru and Fiji are very important as our twin parliaments. We do have a role to play, not as imposing outsiders coming in to tell them what to do but as equals and as friends. Being a state parliament in particular we really have an opportunity in that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is not one of our departments. They do very important work federally, but we can approach these twinned parliaments from the state level more as partners than as their formal trading partners or security or defence partners. We can have that relationship, parliamentarian to parliamentarian. The amount of work our incredible staff – including Sally and Anne and many other staff in this chamber, and Bridget, who really drive that program forward – do on that program is a very important part of the work that we do for our sister nations just around the corner, just off our coast in the Pacific and with our Commonwealth family. There are many things to acknowledge, note and celebrate in the work our amazing parliamentary staff do.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:28): I too rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025. This is an annual opportunity to say a number of thank-yous to the Parliament staff but also the Department of Parliamentary Services staff in general. A budget is always about funding services across the state but it is also an opportunity to reflect on our own house. The

successful functioning of the Parliament and the very heart of our democracy relies on a dedicated and often unseen workforce. As we debate funding the state, it is right that we acknowledge the people who make the work possible. As I have done on previous occasions, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to all parliamentary and DPS staff.

I thank the clerks for their procedural guidance. Stepping into the role of Acting President has been in some regards daunting and in other regards sometimes it feels quite easy until there is some kind of procedural complication or there is a conduct issue in the chamber and then it becomes very complicated and the guidance from the clerks is highly valued, in my experience.

Hansard reporters also are not often very front and centre, but there is only one record of the proceedings of Parliament and that is what goes into *Hansard*. Not a visual record or an auditory record – it is the written record. I really want to thank the Hansard team for getting the facts straight on what has happened in this chamber.

The committee staff also – we are all, in this chamber, involved in committees in one way, whether appearing before them or actually as members of the committee. Again, the support teams for our committees do a power of work without recognition very often. Catering and cleaning teams also look after us on a daily basis.

This year, though, I specifically want to pass on my heartfelt thanks to the parliamentary security team. The Parliament of Victoria is driven by a dynamic, evolving threat landscape. We have all noticed the need for increased security over the last two years. The nature of some public demonstrations has shifted, and while peaceful assembly remains a protected right in Victoria, in recent times we have seen a rise in more volatile and unpredictable protest activities. Sadly, we know threats against members of Parliament and electorate offices are on the rise. The convergence of these reasons for higher security management means we are now getting used to greater security around Parliament House. They are the first people we see in the morning, and they are often the last people we see at night. They are the public face of our building, responsible for the safety and security of every person within the precinct, members, staff and visitors alike. I want to thank the teams who manage the front and back entrances with such professionalism and good humour, no matter the weather, which seems to be in extremes often, and especially in the context of what appears to me to be the slowest ever renovation in the whole of the universe. There are always changes going on in the building and there is always a door blocked off or there is some area inaccessible, so that always poses challenges as well for the security team.

Security officers – I spoke to a couple, including guest services. What they love most, almost universally, is the people that they are dealing with. They enjoy the daily interactions, the brief conversations and the feeling of being at the centre of Victorian democracy. They appreciate being part of a team and the sense of purpose that comes with their important role. They said to me that the challenges are the long hours, especially on sitting days, and spending so much time on their feet. Another challenge is the occasional need to de-escalate situations with difficult individuals – a task they handle with professionalism. Visiting Parliament, we know for some visitors, can be a very emotive and heightened experience, so it is important to have that experience in our security and guest services teams to handle those issues. I asked them how MPs can assist security and guest services. The answer is often simple and humbling: wearing our parliamentary IDs visibly helps them do their job efficiently and having a little patience and understanding at security checkpoints, remembering they are following procedures designed for our own safety. I know I have experienced frustration at the front door during changes as well, so I really do appreciate the steps that are taken.

To put a human face on this vital team, I want to tell you about one of the officers, a young woman who lives in Wyndham Vale. She is from Punjab in India originally and she lives in Wyndham Vale with her husband. She has a child, and on average it takes her an hour on the train to get to Parliament in the morning. She works very long hours with short breaks, and we see her in a number of different

locations around the annexe. She said that it is her experience with the people and the public that she really enjoys, and it really suits her because she is a sociable person.

I did ask guest services, and one of the guest services people has been with us for 29 years this year, so 30 years next year. He used to work at Avis, Myer, V/Line; Jeff Kennett, he said, paid him out. He used to be the President's orderly – I believe the President does not have an orderly anymore – and a chamber attendant, so he has done quite a few things in this place. Apparently he had to set up the food for the President and serve the food when the President hosted ambassadors and things; that was a different time. He also conducts tours. He once conducted a tour for the former Speaker of the Canadian Parliament as well as another one for Theresa May, the former Prime Minister of the UK. And of course they have to deal with the mistiming of arrivals – for instance, someone coming too early, and if they are a very important person they then have to try and entertain them for a little while they are waiting for their host to come and get them. He said, 'How can MPs help? Please read your messages accurately. MPs often go to the front door instead of the back door.' 'Register your guests' – that is the other request – and the third one is that he found it tough on sitting days with the very long hours, before the hours were shortened with OH&S, because they have come in now where they do it more like a shift. He did say that he paid his mortgage off with all the extra hours, but it was pretty exhausting. He said, 'Now it is better because we have OH&S. They provide us with seats and we are basically doing shift work.'

Just to finish on a security officer, at the other end of the scale, this security officer has been working at Parliament for one year. He has to liaise with PSOs and MPs, the public and Parliament House. He also pointed out that he has to check who else comes in the building, so when there are caterers bringing food in, when there are guests for events, when there are entertainers coming in, all those people have to be security checked as well. There are so many different perspectives that security officers need to view in their role in keeping all of us safe. He had one suggestion that MPs could do: 'Tell your guests to carry photo ID, because that is now required and it can get very complicated if they don't'. So I really would like to say a big thankyou to the security team. I think it has been a tough year for them, and I hope that things are a lot quieter and more boring for them in the next 12 months.

Just in closing, I want to say this is a really important bill to make sure that the wheels of democracy are carried forward in an appropriate way, and everybody that works at the Department of Parliamentary Services and in this building deserves our recognition and thanks. I encourage all members to take a moment this week to thank the security officers, the cleaners and the caterers for their work. They are essential to the functioning of this Parliament, and I am proud to place my gratitude for their service on the record today.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:38): In rising to make a contribution on the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 I was reminded of the people that this bill serves, and that is the people of Victoria, and we could not do our jobs without the people that keep this place running day in and day out. To each and every one of you can I just say that you are the backbone of this place and deserve to be recognised for all your efforts. I have seen firsthand how many long nights and cups of coffee go into your work to keep our democracy strong. Your high standards ensure future generations understand both what we say but also what we mean and its impact on the Victorian people. Your professionalism, integrity and commitment ensure that this Parliament not only functions but thrives. Whilst the elected members here may change, the strength and continuity of the Parliament rest in no small part on your shoulders. In this bill today we see your support for us in our duties as you uphold the rules and traditions that give meaning to our democracy, during the long hours, often without public recognition, in service of something larger than any individual here – and that is the people, today and tomorrow, in Victoria.

In here we all talk about public service, but truly it is the folks that this bill pays that are the exemplification of the ideals of a public servant. More than that, you are the stewards of our democracy, and you work with discipline, care and a deep sense of responsibility. It is your knowledge, your discretion and your dedication that are essential to everything that we do, but I will also say it is

so very much your patience. Many of you have served over many decades, witnessed changes to this place and guided in new generations of members, as well as young Victorians as they enter this building for the first time, their eyes full of bewilderment and amazement at what happens in here. You maintain the traditions that connect our work to the foundations of parliamentary democracy while also helping us to adapt to new challenges and modern expectations and to tackle old problems – like how we get our printer working. We see your efforts in the calm efficiency of a well-run sitting day, in the meticulous records that you keep for history and in the safe and respectful environment you foster for all who walk through the doors. In recent years it is fair to say that we have asked more of you than ever before. From those new technologies that I mentioned to ensuring that Parliament continues its essential work in times of great uncertainty, you have met every one of those challenges with resilience and resolve. I offer you my thanks. We value all of you and we rely on you. We are all the better for your service and dedication to our democracy.

There are some folks that I want to shout out to. The cleaning crews' behind-the-scenes efforts in offices, committee rooms, galleries, corridors and even public amenities go largely unremarked, yet their work keeps this magnificent building clean, secure, respectful and a place of pride for all Victorians. To the dining room and catering staff who go beyond, serving trays, hosting lunches, coordinating formal events and even sharing their culinary efforts with the community, thank you so much. Your warmth and generosity reflect the compassion of the institution you serve. I thank every one of the clerks, Hansard staff, secretariat staff, security staff and the capable attendants. Can I just give a shout-out to the new attendant who only began this week. I did catch her name, but I will just call her 'sister girl'. I reckon she is going to love this job. I definitely said she had done really well landing a gig here. Congratulations to the cleaning team, IT, the library staff, the dining staff, the committee researchers and the policy and administrative staff. Your efforts are essential pillars of our democracy. I will also say thank you to the finance team at the Department of Parliamentary Services. As we get to the end of the financial year, I am so incredibly grateful for all your efforts. Thank you so very much. Your contribution is not small, and it is absolutely not insignificant. The cycles of elections come and go and the public eye shifts, but your steadfast work underpins it all.

The building is more than bricks and mortar and gold, as you can see here. It is really a living, breathing institution, enlivened by those who care for it daily. The fact is that in this sitting week alone we have had representatives from parliaments across the world come here. There is something very magical and special about this place that means that we carry our gratitude today beyond words. May we continue to support and respect our parliamentary staff, ensuring they have the resources, recognition and respect they deserve, because without them this Parliament simply would not run. We are deeply grateful and here to say thank you. With that, I offer my thanks and commend the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025 to the chamber.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (16:44): I move, by leave:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

*Motions***Budget papers 2025–26****Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the budget papers 2025–26 be taken into consideration.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (16:46): It is my time to shine. I am very pleased to speak on the take-note motion on the budget. It is a typical Labor budget – full of empty promises and largesse but no financial discipline. The one thing that it lacks most is substance. It is empty; it is a void of nothing. ‘Doing what matters most’, for all intents and purposes, is just a shallow marketing phrase thought up by the brains trust in the Premier’s office. This budget is one that reflects true Labor values: poor financial management, ignoring regional communities and budget blowouts. Debt still continues to climb to almost \$200 billion. In 2014 it was sitting at around \$20 billion, and in 2017 it was actually heading down towards \$17 billion, but now we are facing a situation where the financial standing of the state is at severe risk. Ratings agencies are looking at Victoria with a big question mark hanging over the state’s head, and we have got an interest rate bill that means that over \$1.2 million every hour is spent on servicing debt as opposed to actually solving the problems that Victorians face – problems like roads; public transport; hospitals and ambulances; education, which has just copped a \$2.4 billion hit; housing, where the state was once a leader but now has the wooden spoon; and police, where our force is under pressure and criminal activity is causing a massive crisis in community safety. Then we have our first responders – Country Fire Authority and Victoria State Emergency Service volunteers, Fire Rescue Victoria and United Firefighters Union officials, whose job it is to keep our communities safe. The government’s solution? Tax, tax and tax.

The introduction of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, the emergency services tax, is a kick in the guts to many regional Victorians. The government seem to operate under this sort of deceptive veneer that the funds raised from the tax go towards volunteers. It could not be further from the truth. Sadly, the bulk of the \$2 billion raised over the next three years will go towards funding agencies and bureaucrats. Volunteers are again irrelevant. I guess it is very much a Labor budget, punching down on those that can least afford it, because the government wants to tax farmers with an increase of 150 per cent to the fire services levy. Everyone else pays, at minimum, a 99 per cent increase. Why farmers? Well, according to the government, it is because they have the capacity to pay. Talk about slapping regional Victorians in the face.

What I would like to do is read out a social media post. It was posted by a young farmer, Lily, who lives in Alvie in south-west Victoria. Lily and her family have been on the land for a number of years, and this post reached thousands of people. It starts:

It’s May. The tractor wipers should be clearing rain but instead, they’re clearing dust while we feed stock in drought conditions. Whilst hand-rearing orphaned calves/lambs after their mothers abandon them, too weak or too stressed to care for them.

We spend hours feeding stock and drilling pastures, giving us too much time alone with our thoughts. And lately, the same question echoes louder each day: ‘Is this really worth it?’

Farmers work 365 days a year, only to sink deeper into debt. Most farmers have worked on a loss the past 3–5 years. Would anyone in the city or our premier get out of bed, to not make a cent?

Farmers battle constant public perception from city folk who think farmers are wealthy, who believe food magically appears on supermarket shelves, not grown and raised on the land we fight to keep.

Then come the phone calls. The ones we dread. Bank managers. Accountants.

“We need to catch up,” they say.

We nod, hang up, and carry on hearts heavy, minds racing. Wondering how we’ll pay for feed, water, vet bills, maintenance & this months bank repayments.

How we will afford this month’s school fees, shoes that fit the kids, then resort to cancelling a trip away for the children. Some even being left no option but to sell the family pets.

In farming communities, local footy and netball clubs are more than just weekend activities, they're lifelines. But lately, the conversations echo the same heavy themes: no money, no fodder, no water. Once the footy was an outlet, now it's more like a counselling session. Every week, another farmer walks into the club rooms and says they're done. They've had enough. Their selling up.

With that each family that leaves, the community feels the loss. Fewer players for the teams, fewer kids at the school, fewer customers at the local store. These choices, though deeply personal and often made in quiet desperation, are slowly draining the life out of our rural towns. The spirit that once held us together is being chipped away, one family at a time.

People forget: you need a farmer three times a day breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

But what happens when the farmers struggle for money to feed themselves?

And to our Premier, Jacinta Allan thanks for the continued ignorance.

When the next bushfire season hits, we'll be watching. You better be on the frontline in a CFA uniform fighting the very fires that destroy the communities, that your taxes, levies and policies have already begun to ruin.

This is more than a job. It's a way of life. A lifeline. And it's slipping away.

Lily's words echo throughout the farming communities of Victoria, particularly in my electorate of Western Victoria. Since that time the government has announced a reprieve of a one-year halt of the farming component of the emergency services tax. But most people can see it for what it actually is, kicking the can down the road. The tax still exists. The tax will still be imposed. Drought conditions do not go away in 12 months; it takes years. Even the government's own MPs think the tax is unfair and want to see massive changes. Despite the rhetoric, they all voted for it – every single one. When the time came to stand up for regional communities, the government were nowhere to be seen. Do not even start on the drought taskforce, which is yet to produce anything of merit.

This budget does typify Labor values: punching down on those that can least afford it in an attempt to fund vanity projects in Melbourne and to plug an ever-increasing budget black hole. The community are sick and tired of being taken for granted, especially regional communities. I for one will never, ever apologise for standing up for regional Victorians. This Labor government, however, has a lot of apologising to do. Let us hope they get on with it.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:54): I speak on the Victorian 2025–26 budget. This budget is grounded in the lives of Victorians and reflects our priorities and respects our communities. From Warrnambool to Hamilton, Edenhope to Nhill, Stawell to Dartmoor, Warracknabeal and Port Fairy, these are the towns and people that contribute greatly to our Victorian economy, and this budget recognises that with practical investment. It delivers across the board to deal with cost of living, health, education, transport, jobs, public safety, community sport, environment and food security, most of the things that were raised in a negative frame by the previous speaker. This budget is helping to build a fairer, stronger Western Victoria, and that is what I want to focus on.

Education is the single most powerful tool for creating opportunity, and that is especially true in regional Victoria. Every child, no matter their postcode, deserves a safe, modern and inspiring place to learn. This budget makes that a reality. In Edenhope we are investing \$13.1 million in Edenhope College to upgrade administration areas and modernise building B. This is not just about bricks and mortar, it is about giving young people the confidence and the facilities they need to succeed. In Stawell \$4.7 million will go to Stawell West Primary School for their critical refurbishment of block A. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Stawell West Primary School. It is a terrific, caring school, and the refurbishment will dramatically enhance student amenities and improve support spaces for teachers. Particularly amongst its student population, this school has a very strong representation of First Nations children as well as new arrivals, which is not the profile, particularly the new arrivals, that you would expect in an outer-regional community. Good facilities and a happy learning environment are what Labor is all about, no matter where you live. In Hamilton \$403,600 has been allocated to Hamilton North Primary School to refurbish student toilets, an issue raised by parents and staff alike. I could certainly see why these new facilities were needed when I called in a few weeks ago. These are the sorts of basic yet important improvements that make a real difference.

In Warrnambool – it is so exciting – we are delivering a new tech school, a state-of-the-art facility that will provide hands-on STEM learning linked to local industry. It will prepare students for future jobs in high-tech agriculture, health innovation and advanced manufacturing, ensuring our country kids have the pathways to great careers in the region that they call home. The tech school will include robotics, AI and of course advanced digital design. This is really what regional education reform looks like under Labor – thoughtful, practical and fair. The budget also provides continued support for breakfast clubs at schools, for excursion and camp funding and for uniform support. This is a truly supportive strategy for the cost of living, and this is particularly welcome in regional communities.

The budget also provides health funding. Access to timely, affordable health care is one of the top concerns I hear from locals – and rightly so. No-one should have to travel long distances or face long delays to get basic care. That is why this budget continues funding for 12 state-run urgent care clinics, including one in Warrnambool. These services provide fast, local access to health care for non-emergencies. They take pressure off hospital emergency departments, and I must admit, a person very, very close to me had their life saved in the Warrnambool emergency department a few weeks ago. It was fantastic that there was not a massive queue at the time.

This budget delivers on stronger, safer transport and roads as well. Western Victoria literally moves on freight produced by farming, food processing and tourism and the add-on businesses that support those primary industries. There is no doubt our roads need to continue to improve and keep up. That is why this budget delivers critical investments in transport infrastructure to keep our economy and communities connected. At Mount Emu Creek bridge, near Terang, we are investing \$797,000 to upgrade the structure for high-productivity freight vehicles. Almost a third of the nation's food and fibre potentially will travel over that bridge. This investment will boost freight capacity along the Princes Highway West and improve efficiency for regional producers. In Nhill \$530,000 is being delivered for a major upgrade to the Nhill trailer exchange, including new amenities for female truck drivers. This long-overdue improvement will ensure safety, dignity and inclusion in a sector where women have too often been overlooked. Some may not see these as flashy projects, but they are essential. They help the people who keep our economy moving, they make sure that the transport sector is inclusive and they improve safety on the roads that we all use. It is important to note this funding is part of a broader \$30 million investment in regional road upgrades across Victoria, because we know better roads mean safer, more productive communities.

Community sport is such an integral part of rural and outer regional living. It is so much more than the fun of competing; it is also about connecting, wellbeing and resilience, and that is why this budget invests \$250,000 into new lighting for the netball and tennis courts at Anzac Park in Warracknabeal. These lights mean players can train and play safely during the shorter days of winter. The lighting will give additional flexibility to a wide range of activities and events. This is part of a wider \$20 million investment in local sports infrastructure across Victoria. It is about backing our coaches, volunteers and families – the people who make grassroots sports possible and keep our communities strong.

In regional areas we know we rely on the CFA and SES volunteers. They are the first ones to respond to bushfires, storms and road accidents, and they deserve modern facilities to do that work. I certainly visited multiple CFA stations in the Grampians on multiple occasions earlier this year and thanked them for the work they did during the fires in the Grampians. This budget delivers funding for an upgrade for the CFA station in Dartmoor, providing a safe fit-for-purpose base for our volunteers. It is part of a \$21 million package to upgrade emergency services infrastructure across the state, and it recognises the unique and irreplaceable role our CFA brigades play in protecting lives and land.

Western Victoria is rich in biodiversity, and the people there feel a strong connection to the land and the animals we share it with. That is why this budget includes \$45,000 in support for the Wildwood Wildlife Shelter, a vital local organisation that cares for and rehabilitates injured native animals. This funding will help improve facilities and support the dedicated volunteers who step in when animals are affected by storms, fires or road trauma. It is another example of how this budget respects the quite essential work done by regional communities.

Our coastal fishing towns, like Port Campbell and Port Fairy, depend on functioning local ports for safety, tourism and industry, and this budget delivers targeted maintenance and upgrades. At Port Campbell we are rehabilitating the lower landing to improve safety and access for boats. I must admit I have swum from that jetty on and off all my life. In Port Fairy we are reinforcing the river training and wall structures to protect the harbour and public access. These works protect infrastructure, support the local economy and preserve the identity of our coastal towns.

Regional communities deserve to feel just as safe on public transport as anyone else. The budget funds expanded CCTV coverage at six stations along the Warrnambool, Geelong and Ballarat lines, including Warrnambool station. This will help deter antisocial behaviour and support real-time monitoring, keeping passengers and staff safe. We know that this is yet another investment in the Warrnambool line upgrade, which has included a complete signalling upgrade, new VLocity trains for the first time on the Warrnambool line and a new passing loop. The upgrade is also including stabling facilities for VLocity trains in Warrnambool, which are currently under construction. This is the kind of investment in regional Victoria that the Allan Labor government is known for.

We also know that families in western Victoria are doing it tough right now. Demand for food relief is rising, and local services are stretched. That is why this budget includes \$6 million to double support for regional food relief efforts, like the incredible work done by Western District Food Share. This funding will support logistics, storage and the critical distribution of healthy food to those who need it most, while also backing the volunteers who give their time every day to help neighbours in need. No-one should go hungry in our state, and this budget responds to that challenge. It absolutely is particularly important in the south-west of Victoria at the moment due to the impacts of the drought on farming families. I know that Western District Food Share and other services in the community of the south-west are providing support to farmers both visibly and behind the scenes nice and quietly.

I want to pass on my thanks to all of the people involved in supporting farmers at the moment. It is extremely tough, and it is going to get tougher before it gets easier. At this time of year many people who visit south-west Victoria would now see green grass because of the rain that has occurred, but at this point in the deepest part of winter with the shortest days and the coldest temperatures, the grass will not grow until the springtime. There are quite a few months to go where that support will be needed.

In conclusion, I am very proud that this budget makes truly meaningful investments in regional Victoria. It invests in our future through schools and health care; it supports the backbone of our communities – our CFA brigades, our volunteers, our freight workers, our teachers and our carers; and it shows respect for the dignity of every person who calls western Victoria home. It is a budget that reflects our Labor values: fairness, opportunity, inclusion and action. As a member for Western Victoria, I am proud to stand here knowing that this budget delivers for the people I represent and that our region's voice is being heard. I will leave my contribution there.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:09): If Mark Twain was alive today, after 10 years of Labor he might change his words. His words were thus – I think he was actually quoting Benjamin Franklin: 'In this world there can be nothing more certain except death and taxes.' After 10 years of Labor government, in this world there can be nothing more certain than Labor is taxing Victorians to death. If we were to rephrase Paul Simon's very famous song *50 Ways to Leave Your Lover*, we could rephrase that in Victoria as '60 ways to tax your voter'. This is the story of 10 years of financial mismanagement by this government – debt, debt and more debt and financial mismanagement and lack of transparency.

We heard the opening speaker earlier today, Mr Davis, reiterate a very chilling and sobering conversation about the forward estimates and of the projected debt that this state will face, that all Victorians will face – \$194 billion in debt. It is higher than New South Wales and Queensland combined, and that relates to \$29 million a day in interest repayments, \$1.23 million an hour, or – Victoria is going to be required to pay, must pay to meet its obligations – \$20,000 a minute. I have just

come from a fantastic meeting with Youth Space, who have been funded partially in Latrobe Valley from the state government and partially in Wellington and East Gippsland through the bushfire recovery funding, and they are doing amazing things in terms of turning youth lives around in a very positive direction. What they would not kill for a couple of minutes worth of debt repayments to continue them, to keep them going, and I commend them for their work.

If we look at *The Long and Winding Road* – to take a phrase from another very famous group – we could put in there ‘crumbling, potholed, shoulders disintegrating and surface in need of rehabilitation’. What we have seen from this government – and the ‘Department Performance Statement’ highlights it – is the ‘Road area major patched: roads in regional Victoria’. That is part of the budget. The target for last year was a little over a million square metres of patching – that is what the government’s target was. It put that as its focus, its mandate to do. Well, the state Labor government achieved 500,000 square metres – half of the target. Rather than actually meeting its own objectives, meeting its own targets and bringing about these positive outcomes, the target this financial year is for 70,000 square metres – a 93 per cent reduction in that resurfacing and patching. That is not acceptable. Go down any country road that is a state government road and you will find dangerous potholes that can rip the rim off your tyres and endanger people’s lives by the fact that people avoiding those potholes can veer either off to the side of the road or onto the other road just to keep their car wheels turning.

If we look at the regional development budget – once upon a time it had its standalone part of a department. Now it is in a back room. It is like an outhouse under this government. Again, they are cutting the regional development budget. We know our regions drive our economy. We have heard from members in this house right across the divide about the importance of our agricultural sector in the drought and how it is our farmers who feed and clothe us. Yet we have seen regional development being put on the backburner by the Allan government.

If we look at the health of our regions – in my Eastern Victoria Region we see the then Andrews government in 2022 committed to build the West Gippsland Hospital. The land has been sitting there available. It has been bequeathed to the people of the Baw Baw shire and it is still waiting – and they will still be waiting for years to come under this government. It is on the never-never. It is in the too-hard basket, and I know the wonderful doctors and nurses and staff that work at the Warragul hospital are just so desperate to have something that is fit for purpose. We see that Wonthaggi Hospital stage 2 was committed to in the 2022 state election. It was earmarked for funding in 2023, and now the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas has again kicked it down the road, kicked the expansion of those services down the road.

Disability – there has been \$120 million cut from the disability sector. There is no stronger advocate in the disability sector than my colleague the member for Gippsland East Mr Tim Bull. He has been a huge advocate. He has his finger on the pulse of what is going on in that budget, and he is highly concerned that our most vulnerable people in this state are having their services cut and comprised.

Let us look at ambulance services, and there is no joy here. If we look at ambulance response times in my Eastern Victoria electorate, there is supposed to be a benchmark, a response time. The ambulance, once called, is supposed to make it to that vulnerable person sitting in their home in an ailing state, in a state of concern and a state of unwellness and meet them within 15 minutes at a minimum of 85 per cent of the time in regional Victoria in those indicated areas. This state government is not achieving that in Bass Coast, where it is 59 per cent of the time, and not in Baw Baw, where it is 65 per cent of the time. They are not achieving that in Cardinia – 57 per cent of the time; and not in East Gippsland – 50 per cent of the time. Those ambulance services are getting to people in East Gippsland only 50 per cent of the time within 15 minutes. There have been some horror stories that have come out, and I thank the ambulance officers that I have spoken with over the last 12 months on this for the work that they are trying to do to better coordinate their limited resources. In Latrobe it is 26 per cent of the time; in South Gippsland, a frightening 46 per cent of the time; and Wellington, about 53 per cent. Understaffed hospitals are unable often to release those ambulances that are ramping. A little while

ago when I was standing with my colleague Martin Cameron at Latrobe Regional Hospital we counted seven ambulances ramping, waiting to be released to get back out into the community and do the work that those wonderful ambos do so well. This is not an acceptable state of play.

If I can turn to crime, our police in Eastern Victoria Region do an amazing job and we are so grateful for the work they do, but they cannot clone themselves, although they need to. That thin blue line is getting stretched thinner and thinner in Eastern Victoria Region, and there are some normal activities that police are trying to get to that they often cannot. The crime stats for Victoria are out today and we see crime fuelled by antisocial behaviour and theft up in Bass Coast, up in Baw Baw, up in Cardinia and East Gippsland and up, up, up in Latrobe, South Gippsland and Wellington. Motor vehicle thefts, residential aggravated burglaries and stealing from a retail store, all of these are up, and common assault is up. These are highly concerning. As my colleague David Southwick said, there are not enough police to keep our communities safe. We know that at any given time over 2000 officers are not available for active duty because of WorkCover, sick leave and vacancies.

If we look at other major projects that we would like done in Eastern Victoria Region, I know my good colleague Danny O'Brien has been advocating for the Foster fire station for many years. Post the fires the minister went out to Mirboo North and said, 'What do you need?' 'We need a new fire station,' said Mirboo North, and they are still waiting for it. Winnindoo is a single truck station, and it has been waiting since before Noah was a young man. Hazelwood fire station – again, those wonderful CFA volunteers out there would love their not-fit-for-purpose facility, with an old shed, one toilet and no catering for females, updated.

Of course we have the SEC sham, and I will leave it at that. Nobody liked it in the Latrobe Valley, because if they had liked it in the Latrobe Valley they would have elected a member there, but they knew; they could see it for the sham that it is.

Then we have the very vexed problem of coastal erosion. We have the people down at Bass Coast struggling in Silverleaves with initiatives that are short term that are failing. We have the people in Inverloch who are also very concerned about the loss of a much-loved public asset that the government seems to be pussyfooting around. The government has provided \$10 million or thereabouts between six different communities. That is insufficient to provide certainty. There needs to be practical application, not just consultation within an inner circle and then a report that is never tabled. We have had no update on funding for the New Haven jetty, and this government has then decided to cut fisheries officers. This is highly concerning. Many of our anglers are very concerned. They love angling, but they also love healthy ecosystems and sustainability of species. If I can go to sustainability of species in terms of my own portfolio, we know that this government has failed. The state of the forests report is now three years overdue. Victorians are still waiting for the government to release the state of the environment report. On the last track there were many poor or below-average benchmarks and outcomes for the environment. The government is not even testing or assessing what is happening in our forests. It is going to lock them up. It is going to go and turn another state forest into a national park. It is going to turn the Wombat and Lerderderg area into a national park, tick that and say, 'Aren't we doing well?', but it actually does not know what is happening in those state parks. It does not know whether it is actually achieving good environmental outcomes, but locking it up – changing the land tenure – apparently saves species. I think not.

While we are on that topic, over the last three years the government has cut the bushfire preparedness budget. For the last three years it has been \$600,000 overall when it was all tidied up. This year the Minister for Environment has offered \$400 million in the budget. When asked in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings, he said, 'Well, these figures are a bit rubbery, and we'll get Forest Fire Management Victoria to go cap in hand to the Treasurer and ask for a Treasurer's advance.' Last time I looked, a Treasurer's advance was supposed to be for issues and emerging emergencies like a bushfire or flood, not for regular core business such as firebreaks and fuel reduction.

We see school infrastructure is being delayed for many in my patch until 2027, and we see this horrific, egregious emergency services tax. Every Victorian will pay this emergency services tax. Every household and every business will have it doubled. Every industry, in terms of owning a commercial entity, will pay double. An industry down the street will be taxed at 64 per cent and farmers will be taxed at 150 per cent. ‘Thank you for feeding us. Thank you for clothing us,’ says the Allan government, ‘and by the way, we’re about to hit you with 150 per cent tax.’ There is one stay for a year, and the government are patting themselves on the back: ‘Look what we’ve done.’ It is a con and it is a crock. On top of that, the CFA, FRV and SES budget over the past two years has been cut by \$160 million. That is what the budget papers indicate. This is the contempt that the Allan government provides, particularly to people in rural and regional Victoria. We can hear all the rhetoric, but country people know that they are getting short-changed by this government that is trying to prop up a black hole of debt. This government’s focus is on metropolitan Melbourne, and rural and regional people are paying the price.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:24): I move:

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

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

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (17:24): I committed to Mr Davis to review an answer from Minister Stitt to see whether she had answered the question at the time. I said in real time I believe she had addressed the question in a number of ways and, reviewing it, I believe that was the case.

Bills

Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

The PRESIDENT (17:24): I have received the following message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Serious Offenders Act 2018**, the **Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004** and the **Corrections Act 1986** and for other purposes.’

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:25): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Harriet SHING: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:25): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

1 Opening paragraphs

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 Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

2 Overview

The Bill amends the *Corrections Act 1986*, *Serious Offenders Act 2018* (SOA) and *Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004* (SORA), to deliver several priority reforms to ensure that safety risks from serious offenders are appropriately managed, to appropriately denounce and deter assaults on custodial workers and make minor amendments to parole and other provisions that are not operating as originally intended.

Specifically, the Bill will:

- amend the SOA to implement recommendations of the 2023 statutory review of the SOA to strengthen the operation of Victoria’s post sentence scheme, address operational issues and reinforce the scheme’s ability to protect the community
- amend the Corrections Act to strengthen sentencing outcomes for people in prison who cause injury to custodial officers
- amend the SORA to ensure that people convicted of serious sex offences who are placed on supervision or detention orders under the SOA (a SOA order) must report to police under the SORA for the duration of their SOA order and at least five years thereafter to help manage their community safety risks, and
- make other miscellaneous amendments to ensure that the parole and other provisions in the Corrections Act are operating as intended.

3 Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages the following human rights in the Charter:

- The right to life (section 9)
- The protection from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment (section 10)
- The right to freedom of movement (section 12)
- The right to privacy (section 13)
- The right to freedom of association (section 16)
- The protection of families and children (section 17)
- The cultural rights of Aboriginal people (section 19(2))
- The right to liberty and security of person (section 21)
- The right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (section 22)
- The right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- The right not to be punished more than once (section 26)
- The protection against retrospective criminal laws (section 27)

4 Human rights protected under the Bill

The proposed amendments in the Bill will strengthen protections for a number of rights in the Charter.

Strengthening the operation of the post-sentence scheme

In general terms, strengthening the operation of the post sentence scheme and altering the reporting periods under the SORA for serious sex offenders, will ensure that safety risks posed by serious offenders are appropriately managed, enhancing community safety. In doing so, the Bill promotes the Charter rights of community members, including the right to life (section 9), the protection of families and children (section 17), and the right to liberty and security of person (section 21).

A number of specific amendments in the Bill will also enhance protections for human rights in the Charter.

Clarifying Post Sentence Authority directions

The Bill amends the SOA to clarify that the Post Sentence Authority (the Authority) can give directions about who a person on a supervision order can live with. These directions can play a critical role in managing the individual's risk, noting that certain co-residents may increase the individual's risk (e.g. if the co-resident is antisocial or an active drug user), or may be vulnerable to being harmed (e.g. if the person on the supervision order has a history of family violence).

These amendments will therefore support the rehabilitation of the person subject to the SOA order, enhance community safety and help reduce risks of family violence. This promotes community members' right to life (section 9), security of person (section 21(1)), and protections for children and families (section 17).

Clarifying the actions police can take following an arrest

The Bill also amends the SOA to clarify the actions Victoria Police can take after arresting a person suspected of contravening a supervision order, including allowing police to release the person unconditionally where appropriate. These changes will make it clear that police can release a person while they conduct further investigations to confirm if a contravention occurred, ensuring the person is not remanded for an extended period. This amendment will therefore reduce the risk of arbitrary detention of people on supervision orders, protecting their right to liberty (section 21).

Aboriginal representation on the Post Sentence Authority

The Bill also amends the SOA to require at least one member of the Post Sentence Authority to be Aboriginal. As the Authority is responsible for overseeing people on post sentence orders, Aboriginal representation will facilitate consideration of the specific needs and perspectives of Aboriginal people who are subject to the post sentence scheme. This will strengthen the cultural rights of Aboriginal people who are subject to the scheme (section 19(2)).

Strengthening sentencing outcomes for causing injury to custodial officers

The Bill also amends the Corrections Act to clarify that offences involving causing injury to custodial officers are prison offences and attract the presumption of sentence cumulation in section 16(3) of the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Sentencing Act). This amendment will strengthen sentencing outcomes, helping denounce and deter these offences and improve the safety of the prison environment. This will promote the right of custodial officers to security of person (section 21(1)). The reforms also recognise that a safe workplace and workforce are fundamental to a safe, secure, humane and rehabilitative prison system, and, alongside broader reforms being rolled out across the Corrections system, will help protect the rights of both custodial officers and people in custody.

Parole amendments

Finally, the Bill also makes amendments to clarify the application of two parole provisions in the Corrections Act.

Firstly, the Bill will amend the 'No Body, No Parole' provision to correct the unintentionally broad application of the provision. The amendment will make it clear that the presumption against parole in section 74AABA of the Corrections Act does not apply if the victim's body or remains have been located and there is no longer a need to incentivise the offender to cooperate with police to locate it. This will reduce the risk that the provision will prevent a person receiving parole even after their victim's body has been located and the Adult Parole Board has assessed that they are suitable – which could otherwise limit the right to protection from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, the right to be free from arbitrary detention, and the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (sections 10(b), 21(2) and 22(1) of the Charter).

The Bill will also amend the Corrections Act to ensure the Adult Parole Board can revoke an automatic cancellation of parole. This will allow the Adult Parole Board to reinstate a person's parole if it was automatically cancelled under the Corrections Act, protecting their right to protection from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment and right to be free from arbitrary detention (section 10 and 21 of the Charter).

5 Charter rights engaged or limited by the Bill

Several reforms in the Bill engage or limit Charter rights.

Clarifying the Authority's directions

The Bill amends the SOA to clarify the Authority's power to give certain directions to people on supervision orders. The Bill clarifies that if a court imposes a condition on a supervision order about where a person can live, then the Authority can give directions about who the person can live with in accordance with any authorisation provided by the court.

Right to privacy (section 13(a))

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

Empowering the Authority to give directions about who people on supervision orders can live with could interfere with the person's privacy, family or home.

However, it is my view that these provisions are appropriately circumscribed so as not to authorise any arbitrary interferences with these matters. As noted above, directions about where a person on a supervision order can live play a critical role in managing the individual's risk by limiting their exposure to possible triggers and protecting people who are vulnerable to being harmed.

There are also a number of safeguards in place to ensure directions are only given where necessary and proportionate to this purpose, thereby protecting against any arbitrary application of a direction. Firstly, under the new section 36A(1), the Authority will only be able to give directions about who a person can live with if the Court both imposes a condition on a supervision order restricting where the person can live, and authorises the Authority to give directions in relation to that condition. Under the new section 36A(2), the Court will also retain discretion to order that the Authority cannot give directions about who a person can live with. Finally, the Authority is also subject to a number of obligations to protect rights of offenders, including the right to privacy. For example, section 139 of the SOA requires the Authority to aim to ensure directions constitute the minimum interference with the right of an offender's liberty, privacy or freedom of movement necessary to achieve the purpose of the condition. The Authority is also a public authority under the Charter and is required to give proper consideration to, and act compatibly with, Charter rights (including the right to privacy) when making decisions in accordance with section 38 of the Charter. This would include any decision to give a direction to a person subject to a supervision order about who they can live with.

For these reasons, it is my view that these provisions do not constitute an unlawful or arbitrary interference with a person's family or home and are therefore compatible with the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter.

Right to freedom of movement (section 12), freedom of association (section 16(2)), and protection of families (section 17(1))

Empowering the Authority to give directions about who people on supervision orders can live with may also engage:

- The right in section 12 of the Charter, which provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the freedom to choose where to live,
- The right in section 16(2) of the Charter, which provides that every person has the right to freedom of association with others, and
- The right in section 17(1) of the Charter, which provides that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the State.

Directions about who people on supervision orders can live with could limit an individual's ability to choose where to live and who they associate with, including whether they can live with their family or children. This could engage and limit the rights in sections 12, 16(2) and 17(1) of the Charter.

However, I consider that the amendments made by the Bill justifiably and proportionately limit these rights in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. As noted above, any limitations placed on these rights are necessary to serve the legitimate purpose of preventing the escalation of an individual's risk of reoffending, including by assisting in their rehabilitation, and may in some instances, protect the rights of children and families under sections 17(1)-(2) of the Charter. These amendments will also promote community safety by reducing the risk of reoffending. The safeguards discussed above will also ensure that the directions are only made where necessary to achieve this purpose and constitute minimum interference with these rights.

For these reasons, I conclude that amendments to clarifying the Authority directions in the Bill are compatible with the rights in sections 12, 16(2) and 17(1) of the Charter.

Clarifying procedural requirements for attempted contravention offences

The Bill will also help reduce fragmentation of criminal proceedings by clarifying that the court that made a supervision order should be responsible for hearing and determining offences of attempting to contravene a supervision order, not just offences where a contravention has occurred. In effect, this change will require attempted contravention offences to be uplifted to the County Court or the Supreme Court (whichever court made the supervision orders), along with any related summary offences. This will support continuity of judicial oversight of the offender and reduce fragmentation of proceedings.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24(1))

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence 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.

Uplifting attempt offences could engage this right by requiring the Magistrates' Court to transfer proceedings for charges of attempting to contravene a supervision order to the higher courts, effectively bypassing the committals process which would ordinarily determine whether there is sufficient evidence to support a conviction of the offence charged.

The *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* and longstanding High Court authority provide that a committal hearing must be held in all cases in which the accused is charged with an indictable offence, except where a direct indictment is filed, or the charge is heard and determined summarily. While it could be argued that uplifting all attempted contravention offences to the higher courts and bypassing this procedural step could limit the right of the accused to a fair trial, I consider that there is no limitation as the County Court and Supreme Court are competent, independent and impartial and would provide an accused with a fair hearing.

Even if there was any limitation, I consider such limitation on this right imposed by the reforms to be proportionate and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter, for the following reasons.

The SOA already provides for the uplift of charges for contravening a supervision order. Consistent with these existing processes, the Bill reduces the risk of unjustifiably limiting the right to a fair hearing by enabling the higher courts to hear and determine a charge for an attempted contravention of a supervision order summarily, meaning the higher court must conduct the hearing and determination of the charge in accordance with Part 3.3 of the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* as far as practicable, and may impose any sentence that could be imposed by the Magistrates' Court. In most cases, proceedings for contraventions of supervision orders are heard summarily by the County Court or Supreme Court. If the court decides not to hear the charge summarily, a direct indictment is filed. This ensures individuals are not unduly disadvantaged by having the proceedings transferred to the higher courts without a committal hearing, protecting their right to a fair trial. The reforms will apply this same process to attempted contravention proceedings.

Uplifting proceedings for attempted contraventions of supervision orders also serve an important policy purpose, supporting continuity of judicial oversight by enabling the court that imposed the supervision order to hear matters related to an attempted contravention of the order it imposed. It will also reduce fragmentation of proceedings relating to the same offending circumstances across different courts which could also promote the right to a fair trial. I consider the reforms are the least restrictive means available of achieving these purposes.

For these reasons, I am satisfied that these reforms are unlikely to limit the right to a fair hearing in section 24(1) of the Charter, but that any limitation on the right is reasonable, proportionate and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

Information sharing powers under the SOA

The Bill amends the information sharing powers to clarify that public health services and hospitals can share information under the SOA with certain authorised persons. This will ensure that agencies with functions under the SOA have access to the information they need to perform their functions and keep the community safe, including the Multi-Agency Panel (MAP) and the departmental teams that support MAP members.

Right to privacy (section 13(a))

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

The amendments to information sharing powers in the Bill will enable public health services and hospitals to share private information about a person on a supervision order about the person's support needs and risks, including medical information, engaging the right to privacy.

However, for the reasons outlined in previous statements of compatibility for the SOA, it is my view that the information sharing provisions in the SOA are appropriately circumscribed so as not to authorise any arbitrary interferences with privacy.

Effective information sharing under the SOA is critical to ensure the effective operation of the post sentence scheme. In some instances, this can include medical information – as access to details about medical diagnoses, medications and other information held by health service providers and hospitals can be critical to identifying changes in risk, ensuring people on supervision orders have access to appropriate rehabilitation and treatment services and in turn, protecting community safety.

I acknowledge that it is also important that the personal information of offenders and victims, which can contain extremely sensitive information, is adequately protected from misuse. In my view, the existing protections under the SOA strike an appropriate balance. The SOA provides that information can only be

shared with a prescribed list of persons and for a defined list of purposes, which are consistent with whole of government standards on disclosure of information as provided for in the Information Privacy Principles in the *Data and Privacy Protection Act 2014*. The SOA also includes safeguards against misuse, such as penalties for any unauthorised use or disclosure of information and the requirement that relevant persons operate guidelines in relation to accessing of information to ensure that access is restricted to the greatest extent that is possible without interfering with the purpose of the legislation. As a further safeguard, public health services and hospitals are public authorities under the Charter, and will be required to give proper consideration to, and act compatibly with, the right to privacy under the Charter, as well as the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and the *Health Records Act 2001* when making decisions regarding the nature and extent of any information shared.

For these reasons, I consider that these amendments will not limit the right to privacy of people on supervision orders as any information shared under the reforms would be done so on a lawful and non-arbitrary basis.

Altering reporting periods under the SORA

The Bill will also alter reporting periods under the SORA for registrable offenders who are on supervision or detention orders under the SOA (SOA orders) for a serious sex offence (affected cohort). The amendments will ensure that the reporting obligations for the affected cohort, which require people to provide certain information to police, will be in place for the duration of their relevant SOA order and at least 5 years after the SOA order expires. These altered reporting periods will help protect community safety by extending a registrable offender's reporting period during a period of transition following the intensive oversight provided by the SOA, and reduce the risk of further sex offending, during a period where a person is considered to pose an unacceptable risk or in the period of transition shortly thereafter where the risk of reoffending remains heightened.

Right to freedom of movement (section 12) and right to privacy (section 13(a))

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

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

Amendments to the SORA introduced by the Bill will extend the period during which affected individuals must provide Victoria Police with personal details, employment details and details regarding their travel outside Victoria. This engages the right to privacy and may place some limitations on the person's freedom of movement.

However, it is my view that the proposed amendments will not result in an arbitrary interference with privacy.

The amendments serve a legitimate purpose of protecting community safety and deterring recidivism by supporting police to monitor the affected cohort. The amendments are also proportionate to that purpose. They target a clearly defined cohort of particularly high-risk individuals and clearly specify the new way in which this cohort's reporting periods are to be calculated, ensuring they apply to a particularly high-risk period when a person is on a post sentence order or transitions away from being closely managed under the post-sentence scheme. It is therefore my view that any interference with privacy is not arbitrary and will not limit the right in section 13 of the Charter.

Furthermore, if the reforms do place any limitations on the right to privacy and freedom of movement, these are likely to be reasonable, proportionate and justifiable under section 7(2) of the Charter. As noted above, the amendments serve an important purpose of protecting community safety, and there are a number of safeguards in place to ensure any limitation on these rights is proportionate to that purpose:

- The Bill will only extend or reinstate reporting obligations if a court has imposed a SOA order for a serious sex offence, which requires the court to find that the individual poses an unacceptable risk of further serious offending.
- The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and the Courts will also retain the power to suspend reporting obligations where they are no longer justified – for example, where a person has experienced significant cognitive decline.
- in terms of the right to privacy – Victoria Police are subject to a number of other obligations to protect the privacy of individuals who report under the SORA. There are also explicit protections in section 24 of the SORA which protect individual's right to privacy when reporting. Victoria Police is also required to abide by the obligations in the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 and, as a public authority under the Charter, must give proper consideration to, and act compatibly with, the right to privacy when making decisions.
- in terms of the freedom of movement – the limitations are relatively limited, as they only require individuals to report on their movement rather than placing any restrictions on where the individual can go.

The above factors all serve to ensure that any limitations imposed by the reforms on an individual's right to privacy and freedom of movement are the least restrictive means of achieving the policy intent and are reasonable and justifiable.

As such, in my view, the reforms are unlikely to amount to an unlawful or arbitrary interference with the right to privacy of the affected cohort, and are otherwise compatible with the right to freedom of movement under the Charter.

Right not to be punished more than once (section 26) and right to be free from retrospective criminal laws (section 27)

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be punished more than once for an offence in respect of which that person has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law.

Section 27(2) of the Charter provides that a penalty must not be imposed on any person for a criminal offence that is greater than the penalty that applied to the offence when it was committed.

These rights may be relevant to amendments in the Bill which alter the reporting periods under the SORA for the affected cohort. However, it is my view that the extended reporting periods do not constitute a penalty or punishment, and therefore do not limit the rights in sections 26 or 27(2).

Both the SORA and the SOA are civil schemes that are preventative rather than punitive in nature. Altering the reporting obligations of people subject to SOA orders is directed towards prevention of further offending and protection of the community rather than further punishment of offenders. The altered reporting periods under the Bill will also only arise if the court has assessed that the individual poses an unacceptable risk of further serious offending by imposing a SOA order for a serious sex offence – a measure targeted at protection of the community and prevention of further offending rather than punishment. For these reasons, the additional reporting obligations imposed under the Bill therefore do not constitute a 'penalty' so as to engage the protections against double punishment or retrospective penalty in sections 26 and 27 of the Charter.

Strengthening sentencing outcomes for causing injury to custodial staff

Finally, the Bill will amend the Corrections Act to strengthen sentencing outcomes for assaults on custodial staff. These reforms clarify that causing injury offences in sections 15A to 18 of the Crimes Act committed against custodial staff on duty are prison offences, and should thereby attract the existing presumption of sentence cumulation under section 16(3) of the Sentencing Act that applies to prison offences.

Protection from torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment (section 10(b)), right to liberty (section 21) and right to human treatment when deprived of liberty (section 22(1))

Section 10(b) of the Charter provides that a person must not be punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.

Sections 21(1) and (3) of the Charter provide that every person has the right to liberty and security, must not be subject to arbitrary detention and must not be deprived of their liberty except on grounds, and in accordance with procedures, established by law.

Section 22(1) of the Charter provides that all persons deprived of liberty must be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

Reforms to strength sentencing outcomes for causing injury to custodial officers will operate alongside emergency worker harm laws, which impose statutory minimum sentences for these same offences committed against emergency workers, including custodial officers. The combined effect of these provisions will mean that courts must require people who commit causing injury offences against custodial officers to serve the mandatory minimum sentence cumulatively unless exceptional circumstances exist so as to displace the presumption of cumulation, and unless a special reason exists so as to displace the mandatory minimum sentence.

In some circumstances, statutory minimum sentences have been found to limit the right to be free from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment (section 10(b)) where a court has been compelled to impose a grossly disproportionate sentence. By requiring the statutory minimum sentence to be imposed cumulatively, these reforms could increase the risk that this right will be limited.

These reforms could also result in more people receiving longer custodial sentences. Where a law authorises detention that is unjust, it may limit the right to liberty, to not be subject to arbitrary detention and not be deprived of their liberty except on grounds, and in accordance with procedures, established by law (section 21(1)-(3)).

Given the reforms clarify the application of the presumption of cumulation applies to offences against custodial workers, section 22(1) of the Charter may also be limited by the reforms where they apply by virtue of the person already serving a term of detention in custody.

However, I consider that any limitation imposed by the Bill on the rights under section 10(b), 21(1)-(3) or 22(1) of the Charter to be reasonable, proportionate and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter for the following reasons.

Firstly, the reforms are necessary to ensure effective denouncement and deterrence of assaults on custodial officers and preserve their right to security of person. The existing presumption of sentence cumulation for prison offences in the Sentencing Act recognises that sentences for offences committed in the prison environment may not provide effective denouncement or deterrence if further time is not added on to the person's existing sentence (particularly if they are nearing the end of their custodial sentence). The reforms also recognise that a safe workplace and workforce are fundamental to a safe, secure, humane and rehabilitative prison system, and alongside broader reforms being rolled out across the Corrections system, will help make prisons safer for both staff and people in custody.

The reforms are also carefully tailored to achieve the important purpose of protecting custodial officers' safety and the overall safety and security of the prison environment while minimising any impact on human rights of offenders. That is, the reforms do not constitute an unreasonable expansion or change to the existing law, but seek to clarify the intended application of an existing presumption of sentence cumulation that already applies to prison offences and that some courts are already applying to causing injury offences committed in prisons against custodial workers. The relevant offences are also narrow and well-defined, and target particularly serious and violent crimes against exposed custodial officers. The reforms therefore seek to impose the minimum limitation necessary to achieve the policy purpose. Courts will also retain some discretion to determine sentence length (within the constraints of emergency worker harm laws), and to impose a concurrent sentence in exceptional circumstances. This will help protect against the imposition of a sentence of imprisonment that is inappropriate, unjust or disproportionate to the offending.

Any deprivation of liberty as a result of the reforms will therefore serve a just and legitimate purpose in accordance with the law that is non-arbitrary, and is unlikely to amount to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, or inhumane treatment when deprived of liberty. It is therefore my view that, in the event these rights are limited, the limitation is reasonable and capable of being justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right to a fair hearing (section 21(1))

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

This right is relevant and engaged because by clarifying the circumstances that attract the presumption that the court must impose a cumulative sentence, the Bill will impact the sentencing discretion of judicial officers.

However, courts retain the sentencing discretion to make a finding that exceptional circumstances exist and consequently apply the sentence concurrently, not cumulatively. Retaining this judicial discretion ensures that the reforms are compatible with the right to a fair hearing.

Hon Enver Erdogan MP
Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Youth Justice

Second reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:25): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

The Bill will support the Victorian Government's commitment to safer communities and safer prisons by strengthening protections for custodial officers and improving post-sentence management of people who have committed serious offences.

The Bill will implement a range of reforms to address priority issues affecting the corrections system and post sentence scheme:

- The Bill will amend the *Corrections Act 1986* to denounce and deter assaults on custodial officers by strengthening sentencing outcomes for people in prison who cause injury to custodial officers on duty.

- The Bill will amend the sex offender registration scheme in the *Sex Offender Registration Act 2004* to ensure serious sex offenders who are subject to post sentence orders must report to police for an extended period where appropriate.
- The Bill will amend the *Serious Offenders Act 2018* to implement recommendations of the statutory review of the Act and strengthen the operation of Victoria's post sentence scheme, and
- The Bill will make minor amendments to the Corrections Act to clarify the application of provisions that are not operating as intended.

Denouncing assaults on custodial officers

To help deliver Government's commitment to safer prisons, the Bill introduces reforms into the Corrections Act to help denounce and deter offences on custodial officers involving causing injury.

Too many people in prison who cause injury to custodial officers are not required to serve any additional prison time for their offending. Despite an existing presumption in the Sentencing Act that requires sentences for prison offences to be served cumulatively, a lack of clarity in the legislation means that some perpetrators who cause injury to custodial officers receive concurrent sentences to be served at the same time as their existing sentences. This means they spend no additional time in prison after assaulting a custodial officer.

Custodial officers have a right to feel safe at work. The impacts of assaults on custodial officers are often significant, and can include ongoing health impacts and trauma requiring specialised support and treatment. Assaults on custodial officers also compromise perceptions of safety at work, leading to difficulties attracting and retaining staff, and can have flow on effects for the safety of prisons more broadly.

The Bill addresses these issues by putting it beyond doubt that certain offences involving injury to custodial officers are 'prison offences' and attract the presumption of sentence cumulation in the Sentencing Act. This means more perpetrators in prison will be required to serve additional prison time if they cause injury to custodial officers.

This amendment will strengthen sentencing outcomes, helping denounce and deter these offences and improve the safety of the prison environment. These reforms also recognise that a safe workplace and workforce are fundamental to a safe, secure, humane and rehabilitative prison system, and alongside broader reforms being rolled out across the Corrections system, will help protect the safety of both custodial officers and people in custody.

Implementing recommendations of the Review of the Serious Offenders Act

The Bill will also amend the Serious Offenders Act to implement recommendation of a statutory review.

The Serious Offenders Act provides the legislative framework for Victoria's post sentence scheme. Under the scheme, a court can order the ongoing detention or supervision of individuals who have committed serious sex and violent offences but continue to pose an unacceptable risk of reoffending after completing their prison sentence.

The government completed a review of the Serious Offenders Act in 2023. The review found that the Serious Offenders Act is operating effectively and as intended, and also made 13 recommendations to further enhance the post sentence scheme.

Following government's commitment to implement the recommendations from the 2023 Review of the Serious Offenders Act, the Bill introduces a number of legislative amendments to improve the operation of the post sentence scheme. These amendments will help strengthen community safety and support effective operation of the scheme by:

- clarifying the actions police can take after arresting a person suspected of contravening a condition of their supervision order,
- improving when victims must be engaged by the Post Sentence Authority to ensure they can be kept informed of important information without unnecessary trauma
- clarifying the directions the Post Sentence Authority can give to people on supervision orders to reduce their risk of reoffending
- creating more flexibility around membership of the Post Sentence Authority to respond to increases in workload, and increasing Aboriginal representation to improve consideration of the specific needs and perspectives of Aboriginal people on the post sentence scheme
- clarifying the information sharing powers under the Serious Offenders Act to ensure that agencies with functions under the Act have access to the information they need to provide appropriate supports to manage risks posed by people on the scheme

- clarifying procedural requirements for attempted contravention offences to reduce fragmentation of criminal proceedings

Altering reporting periods under the Sex Offenders Registration Act

The Bill will also amend the Sex Offenders Registration Act to help manage community safety risks posed by serious sex offenders.

The Sex Offenders Registration Act requires people who have committed certain serious sex offences to provide information to Victoria Police, including personal details, work arrangements and travel plans. These reporting obligations help reduce the risk of reoffending

Many people on the post sentence scheme also have reporting obligations under the Sex Offenders Registration Act. These reporting obligations provide an additional mechanism to manage the ongoing risk of reoffending, and are particularly critical when a post sentence order expires and individuals transition away from the intensive supervision and oversight of the post sentence scheme.

The Bill will amend the Sex Offenders Registration Act to ensure that people who are on post sentence scheme for a serious sex offence must report to police for the duration of their relevant Serious Offenders Act order and at least 5 years after the order expires.

These altered reporting periods will help protect community safety and reduce the risk of further sex offending.

Amendments to the Corrections Act

Finally, the Bill will also make minor amendments to the Corrections Act to clarify the operation of provisions that are not operating as Parliament originally intended.

The Bill will clarify that the ‘No Body, No Parole’ provision only applies if the body or remains of a victim have not been located. The amended provision will preserve an important incentive for people in prison to cooperate with police to locate the body or remains of their victims and bring some closure to victims’ families. A person will not be eligible to be granted parole if the body or remains of their victim is missing unless they can satisfy the Adult Parole Board that they cooperated to help locate the body.

The Bill also makes a minor amendment to allow the Adult Parole Board to reinstate a person’s parole in appropriate circumstances if it is automatically cancelled. Currently, a person’s parole is automatically cancelled if they are sentenced to a further term of imprisonment while on parole. The Bill clarifies that the Adult Parole Board can revoke an automatic cancellation of parole wherever appropriate. For example, if the sentence of imprisonment is very short, it may be appropriate for the Adult Parole Board to reinstate the person’s original parole order rather than requiring the person to go through the whole parole application process again.

Conclusion

The reforms in this Bill support safer communities, safer prisons, and increased efficiencies in the corrections system.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:25): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*Introduction and first reading*

The PRESIDENT (17:26): I have received a further message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Financial Management Act 1994**, the **Constitution Act 1975** and the **Local Government Act 1989** and for other purposes.’

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:26): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Harriet SHING: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.*Statement of compatibility*

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:27): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (Vic) 2006*, (the **Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (the Bill), as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Financial Management Act 1994* (the FMA) to:

- a) update financial management principles to better reflect the expectations of government and the public sector
- b) embed notification processes when there is a risk that a department or public body's budget may be exceeded
- c) include the power to include or exclude certain agencies from the operation of certain provisions of the FMA
- d) remove the requirement for warrants
- e) clarify Accountable Officer, Board, and Chief Finance Officer responsibilities
- f) adjust requirements relating to the Budget Update in an election year
- g) adjust transmission requirements for the September Quarterly
- h) strengthen the requirements around the creation or cessation of agencies
- i) update the Regulations and direction making powers.

To fully remove the requirement for warrants to access public funds in Victoria, the Bill also amends the *Constitution Act 1975*.

To adjust the requirements relating to the Budget Update in an election year, the Bill also amends the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Human Rights Issues

Clauses 17 and 18 of the Bill insert new sections into the FMA that create new reporting requirements for financial information, including where a department or public body is at risk of exceeding its budget.

This financial information is principally expected to include documents like balance sheets and records of expenditures. As such, the information provided under these provisions is unlikely to include any personal information.

Accordingly, no person's privacy is unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with because of any of the provisions in the Bill and in my opinion the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter is not infringed.

As no Charter rights are limited by the Bill, I consider that this Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Hon Jaclyn Symes MP

Treasurer

Minister for Industrial Relations

Minister for Regional Development

Second reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:27): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

This Bill is another example of this Government's commitment to sound financial management.

As a Government we have always invested in the services that Victorians need, and the productivity-enhancing infrastructure to keep our economy strong.

And despite the challenges of a once in one hundred year pandemic, disruptions to the supply of key resources driven by international conflict, a spike in inflation, and global uncertainty, our Government has been deliberate in charting a course through this difficult period protecting jobs and growing our economy.

We continue to demonstrate targeted and disciplined financial management through the fiscal strategy we put in place to aid our recovery. This represents a prudent and systematic approach to strengthening the long-term sustainability of the State's finances.

The first step of our fiscal strategy was creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth. The second was to return to an operating cash surplus. Both these have now been achieved. The budget shows that we remain on track to deliver on the third step – return to an operating surplus – in 2025–26. It also shows that we remain on track over the forward estimates to deliver on the fourth step – stabilising net debt as a percentage of Gross State Product – and the fifth step – beginning to reduce net debt as a percentage of GSP.

This Bill is another important step towards delivering on that fiscal strategy. It will make changes that will improve accountability and transparency across the public sector and its entities, removing outdated aspects of existing legislation and ultimately better reflecting the needs of an increasingly dynamic financial and economic environment.

The *Financial Management Act 1994* is the principal legislative instrument underpinning the financial management framework of the Victorian public sector. The Act was written in the wake of the global economic downturn of the early 1990s. But the world has moved on. Our public sector has become more complex and sophisticated in the 30 years since the Act was introduced. And we need our legislative framework to align with contemporary approaches to governance, performance and risk management.

As was committed to as part of the *2024–25 Victorian Budget*, the Government has reviewed the Financial Management Act to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The review found that the majority of the Act is fundamentally sound.

But given the Government's focus on strengthening Victoria's economy and guarding against future financial challenges, we have identified legislative improvements which will better assist Government to plan for, and deliver, the services that matter most to Victorians.

These amendments are an opportunity to reset expectations and strengthen accountability for every dollar that is given to agencies, supporting us to deliver on our fiscal strategy. It is a signpost for the public sector about the importance of maintaining, and continually improving, sound and sustainable financial management.

The amendments will create the settings for a more risk-based approach to financial management by enabling smaller agencies to be more agile, while holding the larger ones to a higher benchmark. And we will do away with some of the more arcane elements of the Act.

Turning to the specific provisions of the Bill:

The Bill introduces a requirement for agencies to stick to their set budgets and report any financial risks through an 'early warning system'. This will allow government to better manage financial risks as they are identified, putting in place the interventions needed before risks manifest into more significant challenges.

The *Financial Management Act 1994* did not require departments and agencies to set a budget and to stick to it. We will embed Government's expectations that sound financial management includes establishing, adhering to and monitoring set budgets put in place at the start of the year.

The legislated accountabilities for Accountable Officers and Chief Finance Officers will be explicitly updated and clarified. For example, the Act only specifies the requirement for there to be an Accountable Officer, but is silent on their responsibilities. While for Chief Finance Officers (CFOs), the Act currently specifies only that CFOs are to receive money, make payments and ensure proper accounting records and systems are maintained. Times have moved on significantly since these were the sole, or even prime duties, of both the Accountable Officer and Chief Finance Officer. These responsibilities will be updated to include, among

other things, responsibility for the financial management, financial performance and financial sustainability of the relevant department or agency.

The Bill also strengthens the financial management obligations associated with the creation or cessation of agencies to ensure accountability for these agencies is well defined.

There will be greater clarity on how to correctly establish new entities, and in the right structure, so that consistent and appropriate financial management requirements are applied to those entities.

Finally, the Bill is being modernised by removing the antiquated cash accounting system of warrants. While cash and the cashflow statement are still an important financial measure for Victoria's finances, warrants originated in the days when public servants would seek to take cash from the vaults below Old Treasury Building to fund the activities of departments. In those days the warrant confirmed departments were legally allowed to take and spend that money, because once it was taken, there was no practical way to track it. Since those days, modern controls and checks have been introduced. We now have modern banking and IT systems, and strong requirements to provide annual reports demonstrating how funds are spent, making warrants redundant in the 21st Century. The requirement for warrants consumes considerable administrative effort. This reform will bring Victoria into line with most Australian jurisdictions that have abolished the system of warrants.

This Bill delivers on the Government's commitment to review the Financial Management Act to ensure it remains fit for purpose while allowing us to build on the solid foundations in the Act, and will support the Government's fiscal strategy to deliver surpluses and support economic growth.

I commend the Bill to the House.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:27): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

The PRESIDENT (17:27): I have received the following message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Road Safety Act 1986**, the **Road Management Act 2004**, the **Port Management Act 1995**, the **Marine Safety Act 2010**, the **Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988**, the **Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014**, the **Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983**, the **Transport Integration Act 2010** and other Acts and for other purposes.'

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:28): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Harriet SHING: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:28): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Road Safety Act 1986* (**Road Safety Act**), the *Road Management Act 2004*, the *Port Management Act 1995* (**Port Management Act**), the *Marine Safety Act 2010* (**Marine Safety Act**), the *Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988* (**Marine (Drug Control) Act**), the *Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014* (**TSSCE Act**), the *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983*, the *Transport Integration Act 2010*, the *North East Link Act 2020*, the *Fines Reform Act 2014* and other Acts, including to make minor and technical amendments.

Relevant to Charter rights, the Bill introduces a licencing scheme for people providing mooring services in Victoria's commercial ports, streamlines processes for disposing of abandoned things from ports and waterways, expands the powers to compel the production of documents for the purpose of an investigation into a transport safety or marine safety matter, expands the ability to share information with port and waterway managers for law enforcement purposes and excludes particular documents from being accessed under the freedom of information regime.

Human rights issues

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

- the right to privacy (s 13(a));
- the right to freedom of expression (s 15(2));
- the right to property (s 20);
- the right to a fair hearing (s 24(1));
- the right to be presumed innocent (s 25(1));
- the right against self-incrimination (s 25(2)(k)); and
- the right not to be tried or punished more than once (s 26).

Right to privacy

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Expansion of the class of person who is authorised to collect urine and blood samples

Clauses 3, 61 and 104 expand the class of persons authorised to collect blood and urine samples under the Road Safety Act, Marine (Drug Control) Act and *Rail Safety National Law Application Act 2013* to include a person prescribed by regulation. The purpose of collecting these samples, includes, for example, the collection of samples in relation to offences involving alcohol or other drugs under Part 5 of the Road Safety Act, Part 4 of the Marine (Drug Control) Act and alcohol and drug controls for rail safety workers under Part 4A of the *Rail Safety National Law Application Act 2013*.

While the relevant assessment of compatibility with the Charter of prescribing a class of person will be conducted through the requirement for the Minister to certify a Human Rights Certificate with respect to the appropriateness of the specific class of persons proposed to be prescribed, at a general level, I consider that this Bill does not impose any additional interference with the right to privacy. This is because the Bill does not expand the circumstances in which samples can be taken and any person prescribed will be appropriately qualified to collect pathology specimens.

Collection and disclosure of information

New s 73ZX and s 73ZZC inserted into the Port Management Act by this Bill require a person to provide certain personal information as part of their original or renewal application for a mooring service licence.

Clause 60 amends s 298A of the Marine Safety Act to clarify that the sharing of information held by the Safe Transport Victoria that can identify an individual, for example, vessel registration information, with Ports Victoria, a local port manager or waterway manager is permissible for particular purposes. This includes for the prevention, detection and the investigation of offences, and for various enforcement purposes.

New s 49R inserted into the TSSCE Act expands the power of the Chief Investigator to require production of documents to include where the Chief Investigator believes on reasonable grounds that the document may contain information that is relevant for the purposes of carrying out an investigation into a transport safety or marine safety matter.

New s 49ZZA inserted into the TSSCE Act provides for the publishing of investigation-related materials, being reports of, or other documents relating to an investigation into a public transport or marine safety matter, safety advisory statements and recommendations, if the Chief Investigator considers it is necessary or desirable for the purposes of transport safety. Published materials may only include personal information in circumstances allowed for under the regulations.

While not all information required under these clauses will be of a private nature, or be information concerning a natural person, as opposed to information concerning a corporation to which the Charter does not apply, the power afforded to an entity to collect, use and share information or documents may engage the right to privacy. However, to the extent that these provisions do require disclosure of personal information, this will occur in lawful and not arbitrary circumstances.

The requirement for a prospective or current mooring service licence holder to provide certain personal information is clearly linked to the legitimate aim of properly assessing the application for a new or renewal of a licence to ensure the person meets the relevant legislative requirements and standards and so should properly be afforded the licence. The aim is important as matters of licence holder suitability are critical to safeguarding the health and safety of personnel, property and efficient port operations. The requirements will apply to individuals who are voluntarily seeking to work in a regulated industry where special duties and responsibilities attach.

The amendment of s 298A the Marine Safety Act is circumscribed in its scope and allows for the further sharing of information with port and waterway managers in accordance with the requirements of Part 8.8A of the Marine Safety Act and for the legitimate law enforcement purposes outlined in s 298C(1)(k) of the Act, including in relation to criminal offences and for legal proceedings. As such, the circumstances in which information may be used and disclosed will only be as allowed under legislation and for specified non-arbitrary purposes.

The expansion of the powers of the Chief Investigator under new s 49R inserted into the TSSCE Act are similarly circumscribed, including a limitation on the power that it can only be exercised where there are 'reasonable grounds' to believe the document contains relevant information, and sits within a regime designed to improve public transport and marine safety by providing for the independent investigation of public transport safety matters and marine safety matters by the Chief Investigator (new Part 2A of the TSSCE Act). For these reasons, I consider that the expansion of the power to compel the production of documents is clear and precise and proportionate to the legitimate aim of ensuring the Chief Investigator is able to effectively investigate public transport safety and marine safety matters.

The prescribing of circumstances in which personal information can be published under s 49ZZA will be assessed for compatibility with the Charter through the requirement for the Minister to certify a Human Rights Certificate for any associated regulations.

I therefore consider that any interference with the right to privacy resulting from these provisions will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary.

Right to freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. However, s 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality. The right to receive and impart information and ideas under s 15(2) has been held to create a positive obligation on government to give access to government-held documents.

The Bill inserts new s 197AA into the Transport Integration Act to provide for an exemption from the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* for documents that are in the possession of the Chief Investigator, or their

agents, delegates or particular employees, where those documents are obtained, received or created as part of an investigation into a public transport safety matter or a marine safety matter or where the documents are incident reports or complaints made in relation to a public transport safety matter or a marine safety matter.

By providing for this exemption, the Bill restricts access to documents which may otherwise be accessible to the public through the freedom of information scheme and so may limit rights under s 15(2). However, I consider that this is a lawful restriction which is reasonably necessary to both protect public order and the rights of others within the meaning of the internal limitation in s 15(3). The expression ‘protection of ... public order’ is a wide and flexible concept and includes measures for ‘peace and good order, public safety and prevention of disorder and crime’ (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50). The meaning of protecting the rights of others is similarly broad and would include restrictions reasonably necessary to protect the right to life of the general public who may be at risk during a transport safety incident.

The object of the Chief Investigator is primarily to seek to improve transport and marine safety by providing for the independent, no-blame, investigation of transport safety matters. The purpose of excluding these documents from possible disclosure under the Freedom of Information regime is to ensure that individuals are not discouraged from candidly providing information and disclosing all possible relevant documents. This may hamper the investigation of transport safety matters and impair the ability of the Chief Investigator to make meaningful findings and recommendations for improvements. Reports and safety advice and recommendations are still able to be published publicly where it is considered necessary or desirable for the purposes of transport safety (new s 49ZZA inserted into the TSSCE Act by this Bill). I consider that the restriction on s 15(2) is tailored to this purpose and reasonably necessary to encourage frank disclosure, ultimately protecting public safety and the right to life of the general public by improving transport and marine safety.

For these reasons, I consider s 197AA falls within s 15(3) of the Charter and so imposes no limitation on the freedom of expression.

Property rights

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

Clauses 29 to 37 and 48 to 55 amend the provisions under the Port Management Act and Marine Safety Act dealing with the management, including sale and disposal, of abandoned things from ports and waterways.

The Bill expands the circumstances in which an item can be classified as abandoned, such that in addition to the current criteria, it shall also be sufficient for an item to be unattended for 1 month and for the owner to have failed to move the property after being asked in writing by the port manager within the time specified in the written request (clauses 30 and 49). Once classified as abandoned, the item is liable to be moved, stored or disposed of, including being sold by the port or waterway manager pursuant to the requirements of Division 4 of Part 5B of the Port Management Act and Division 2 of Part 5.5 of the Marine Safety Act as amended by this Bill. Clauses 34 and 53 also insert new provisions to clarify that a person who is given or sold a thing under s 88T of the Port Management Act or 219D of the Marine Safety Act acquires that thing free from all encumbrances. A person may also be liable for costs associated with the movement, storage and disposal of the item and entitled to compensation for the sale of the item in particular circumstances (s 88U and 88V of the Port Management Act and s 219E and 219F of the Marine Safety Act as amended by clauses 35, 36, 54 and 55).

The ability of a port or waterway manager to deal with a person’s property in this manner will engage their property rights under s 20. However, in my view the right is not limited, as the circumstances in which property can be treated as abandoned and how it can then be dealt with by port or waterway managers will be under a clearly formulated, publicly accessible law and confined to specific circumstances necessary, for example only after reasonable enquiries as to the owner of the item are made or notice has been given, to meet the legitimate purposes of ensuring ports and waterways are kept clear of abandoned property that may be detrimental to the operation of ports, the use of waterways or be environmentally or otherwise harmful. For these reasons, I consider that these provisions are compatible with the right to freedom of property in the Charter.

Right to a fair hearing

Taking disciplinary action against mooring service licence holders

Clause 43 inserts new Part 4C into the Port Management Act introducing a licencing scheme of mooring services in Victoria. Under Division 8 of new Part 4C, licence holders may be subject to disciplinary action and have their licence cancelled or suspended where Ports Victoria has reason to believe that the licence

holder has contravened a condition imposed on their licence, has contravened new Part 4C or that the licence was obtained because of false or misleading information given as part of the application. The introduction of a disciplinary regime for mooring licences may be relevant to the right to fair hearing.

Section 24(1) of the Charter relevantly provides that 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. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. 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 the administrative decisions at issue here 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, if a broad reading of s 24(1) is adopted and it is understood that the fair hearing right is engaged by this Bill, this right would nonetheless not be limited. The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision and the right may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. The entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

Having the ability to take disciplinary action provides an important mechanism by which Ports Victoria can ensure licence holders are complying with the terms of their licence and obtained their licence on the basis of truthful information. Compliance with the licencing regime will work to improve mooring operations, reducing the significant risks of serious injury or death to personnel, damage to property and disruption to port operations which can result from poor mooring practices. For example, where a vessel breaks away from its moorings, it can injure personnel, damage itself and other vessels in the vicinity and disrupt operations at the port. In this regard, I note that there have been many examples of near misses occurring at the Port of Melbourne and, in addition, mooring services have been observed contributing to delays at the Port.

The disciplinary regime inserted by the Bill affords the licence holder procedural fairness. Any decision by Ports Victoria to take disciplinary action is made pursuant to a show cause process (new s 73ZZJ) in which the licence holder is provided with the opportunity to provide written submissions on why the proposed action should not be taken (s 73ZZJ(2)(d)) and is subject to internal review (new s 73ZZN and s 73ZZO). Finally, the decision on taking disciplinary action is subject to external review by VCAT (new s 73ZZR). This affords licence holders a hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal and satisfies the requirements in s 24(1) of the Charter.

As such, I conclude that the fair hearing rights in s 24(1) of the Charter are not limited by the provisions referred to above.

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 proven guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision allows for the imposition of criminal liability without the need for the prosecution to prove fault. The right is also 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.

Strict liability offences

The Bill introduces two new offences into the Port Management Act that do not require proof of fault, for example, being that the relevant party acted 'knowingly or recklessly'. The inclusion of these strict liability offences in the Bill may limit right to be presumed innocent under s 25(1) of the Charter. These strict liability offences are:

- New s 73ZW which provides that a person must not provide mooring services in particular commercial ports without a licence; and
- New s 73ZZA which provides that a mooring service licence holder must comply with the conditions to which the licence is subject.

It is noted that new Part 2A inserted into the TSSCE Act by clause 70 of the Bill includes a number of strict liability offences. However, these offences are already in force and are only being re-enacted subject to minor and technical amendments under this Bill, none of which result in an altered impact on Charter rights and so will not be discussed further in this Statement.

Strict liability offences will generally be compatible with the presumption of innocence where they are reasonable, necessary and proportionate in pursuit of a legitimate objective. It is generally considered justified

to impose strict liability to protect public safety, and in the context of regulatory offences where a person is placed on notice to guard against the possibility of inadvertent contravention.

These strict liability offences are directed to the legitimate objective of ensuring that people undertaking mooring services in commercial ports have the requisite expertise and are subject to requirements necessary to encourage the provision of mooring services in a safe and effective manner. As identified above, this ultimately reduces the significant risks to personnel, property and port operations that can arise as a result of poor mooring practices.

It is reasonable and necessary that the offences do not require proof of fault given significant consequences and loss that can arise regardless of whether a licence holder acts knowingly or recklessly. The penalties provide a sufficient and proportionate deterrent of non-compliance with the licencing regime in response to identified risks of poor mooring practices. Further, the offences are reasonable in that they do not exclude the common law defence of honest and reasonable mistake of fact, and they do not attract penalties of imprisonment.

For these reasons, the limitation to s 25(1) of the Charter imposed by the strict liability offences is reasonable and justifiable within the meaning of s 7(2) of the Charter.

Reverse onus provisions

New Part 2A inserted into the TSSCE Act by clause 70 of the Bill also includes a number of offences which contain an exception in the form of an excuse. As above, these offences are being re-enacted, subject to generally minor and technical amendments under this Bill, most of which does not result in an altered impact on Charter rights.

However, new s 49R expands the scope of the existing offence such that a person must not, without reasonable excuse, fail to comply with a direction to provide any document the Chief Investigator believes on reasonable grounds may contain information that is relevant for the purposes of the investigation into the transport or marine safety matter.

This offence contains an excuse (also known as an exception) which places an evidential burden on the accused. In other words, the accused is required to present or point to evidence that suggests a reasonable possibility of the existence of facts that would establish the exception or excuse. The Supreme Court has held that evidential onus provisions on an accused to establish an exception do not transfer the legal burden of proof and do not limit the right to the presumption of innocence. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the essential elements of the offence to a legal standard. Further, the exception relates to matters which are peculiarly within an accused's knowledge, being why particular documents cannot or should not be provided, and would be unduly onerous for a prosecution to disprove at first instance.

Should the right to the presumption of innocence in fact be limited by these provisions, I am of the view that any limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified, in that it is a proportionate measure to the legitimate purpose of the offences, which is to facilitate the effective investigation of transport or marine safety matters with the aim of making improvements to reduce the risk of future accidents or safety incidents. Courts in other jurisdictions have held that the presumption of innocence may be subject to reasonable limits in the context of regulatory compliance, particularly where the commission of regulatory offences may cause harm to the public. Finally, the offences are not punishable by a term of imprisonment.

Accordingly, I am of the view that these offence provisions are compatible with the Charter.

Right against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to 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.

As outlined above, new s 49R of the TSSCE Act expands the power of the Chief Investigator to require production of documents. This has the consequence of also expanding the class of documents to which the existing abrogation of privilege against self-incrimination (as re-enacted in new s 49T) will apply. New s 49T provides that a person is not excused from answering a question or providing information or a document on the ground that to do so would incriminate the person. However, the privilege against self-incrimination is protected by providing both a direct and indirect use immunity in s 49T(2), which ensures that neither the person's answer nor evidence obtained as a consequence of that answer can be used against that person in a criminal proceeding, other than a proceeding arising out of the answer being false or misleading or out of a failure to attend before the Chief Investigator, a refusal to take an oath or affirmation as required by the Investigator or refusing or failing to answer a question lawfully asked by the Investigator.

To the extent that the protection against self-incrimination is abrogated in circumstances where the person has provided false or misleading information or documents, or refused to co-operate with the Chief Investigator, I consider that any limitation to the right under s 25(2)(k) is justified having regard to the need of the Chief Investigator to ensure compliance with the transport and marine safety schemes in Victoria and the broader safety purposes of those schemes. To permit the provision of false information or the refusal to co-operate with lawful requests of the Chief Investigator, and to allow a person to escape sanction for doing so, would fundamentally undermine the enforcement of the scheme.

For these reasons, I consider the Bill is compatible with s 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

Right not to be 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 they have 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.

Penalties and sanctions imposed by professional disciplinary bodies generally do not usually constitute a form of 'punishment' for the purposes of this right as they are protective in nature and not punitive.

As outlined above, new s 73ZZA of the Port Management Act introduces a new offence for failure to comply with the conditions imposed on a mooring service licence. Ports Victoria can also take disciplinary action to cancel or suspend mooring service licences for the same reason. However, this does not mean that taking disciplinary action where an offence has been committed would engage this right. This is because the purpose of taking disciplinary action against licence holders is to protect personnel and property in ports from potential future harm and to minimise risks of disrupting port operations, as discussed above. As these sanctions are for protective rather than punitive purposes, they do not engage the right against double punishment set out in s 26 of the Charter.

Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Hon Harriet Shing MP

Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop

Minister for Housing and Building

Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts

Second reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:28): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

Overview

The Bill will deliver a range of legislative amendments to improve safety, achieve operational and administrative efficiencies, and improve the effectiveness of transport laws. The Bill achieves this by improving enforcement practices and requirements to improve road safety outcomes, addressing known safety risks to workers and reliability at commercial ports by regulating the providers of mooring services, improving the management of certain road infrastructure and making processes for the consent of works on roads more effective, making improvements to legislation that governs the operation of local ports, and a range of other legislative amendments to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of transport legislation.

Improved enforcement of road safety offences

The Government remains committed to improving road safety outcomes across Victoria. The road safety reforms in this Bill represent a continued focus on identifying areas where our road safety regulatory framework can be adjusted to improve enforcement and supporting processes to better detect those drivers that are doing the wrong thing and to provide a general deterrence.

The Bill amends various provisions and offences in the *Road Safety Act 1986*, to support their investigation and enforcement. Under the *Road Safety Act 1986*, it is an offence for a driver to fail to stop and render assistance after a traffic accident where someone is injured or property is damaged. These offences are commonly known as 'hit and run' offences. There are two categories of penalties for these offences. If a person is killed or seriously injured, the act of failing to stop and render assistance is an indictable offence

with significant penalties including up to 10 years imprisonment. The second category of offences cover incidents that have resulted in minor injuries. These are summary offences and have lesser penalties. Summary offences also come with a 12-month period (after the incident) in which Victoria Police can commence proceedings. This limitation has been proven to be insufficient in some cases, because it takes time to investigate and identify who was driving the vehicle at the time of the alleged offence. This Bill will extend the time that Victoria Police have to bring a proceeding for this summary offence from 12 up to 24 months to increase the likelihood that the alleged offender can be identified, located and prosecuted.

We know that driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs is a major contributing factor to the road toll and to serious injuries in Victoria. Part 5 of the *Road Safety Act 1986* contains alcohol and drug-related offences to reduce this risk. When detecting these offences in a range of circumstances a blood sample must be obtained, which can only be done by a registered medical practitioner, or an 'approved health professional' which includes nurses and other persons approved by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. This blood sample must be obtained within three hours of the person driving the vehicle. In practice, Victoria Police can in some circumstances find it difficult to conduct the necessary impairment assessment and find a registered medical practitioner or approved health professional to take the blood sample. The amendment in this Bill will allow for additional professionals to be prescribed as approved health professionals for the purposes of obtaining these blood samples, improving Victoria Police's ability to detect drink and drug driving offences.

A range of other offences in the *Road Safety Act 1986* also seek to reduce injuries and fatalities on Victoria's roads. Some of these offences are detected by way of prescribed road safety cameras, and include speeding, red light, seatbelt and distracted driving offences. The range of offences detected via these cameras has expanded in recent years and sworn police officers are required to issue infringements for these offences. This Bill will amend the *Road Safety Act 1986* to allow for specifically authorised Victoria Police employees to be able to issue infringements for these offences, freeing up sworn police officers for other duties. Victoria Police employees would need to be authorised in writing by the Chief Commissioner of Police before they can issue these types of infringements.

Addressing safety and reliability risks for mooring in commercial ports

The Government is committed to addressing safety and improving reliability in Victoria's commercial ports. Recently, port stakeholders have raised concerns about the safety of mooring services provided at Victoria's commercial ports. Mooring, and unmooring, of vessels is an inherently high-risk activity where a vessel's mooring lines come under high tension as a vessel is secured to berth and is performed at ports in an industrial-like environment and is subject to sudden and unpredictable changes in mooring line tension. These activities are currently unregulated under the *Port Management Act 1995*.

Mooring operations are vital to a port's operations. Poor mooring practices have the potential to injure or kill personnel operating in the port and the potential to damage wharf infrastructure or vessels. Poor mooring practices can also increase the likelihood of a vessel breaking away and causing considerable damage, both to itself and to other vessels in the vicinity. In addition, inadequate mooring practices can serve as a critical vulnerability in a bustling port environment like the Port of Melbourne, and in the event of the mooring service being significantly compromised, shipping movements could stop, potentially closing the port. For these reasons, the Government is taking action to regulate mooring services to ensure that the providers of such services adhere to minimum standards and conduct their operations in a safe manner.

To manage these risks to personnel and to ensure port operations are run efficiently, the Bill will introduce both a licensing scheme for mooring services and new powers to make a determination setting standards and requirements for mooring services at commercial ports. The new regulatory requirements will be administered by Ports Victoria. The new scheme is substantially similar to the existing scheme that applies to towage services under the *Port Management Act 1995*.

Ports Victoria will have powers to make a mooring services determination to establish the different standards and requirements that will apply to the provision of mooring services in a prescribed commercial port. The determination is expected to include various requirements, standards and obligations related to the training of staff engaged or employed by the provider, the equipment, vehicles and vessels used by the provider, as well as procedures for the reporting of incidents and damage.

To provide a mooring service at any commercial port where a mooring service determination is in effect, a license will be required. Ports Victoria will be responsible for issuing mooring services licences, which are subject to conditions and are valid for a period of five years, unless suspended, cancelled, or surrendered. The licence will effectively certify that an applicant has sufficient knowledge, skills and expertise in relation to the provision of mooring services and directions by the harbour master, amongst other things, so that they can provide mooring services safely in commercial ports.

Increased flexibility for the management of road assets and improved processes for works on roads

The *Road Management Act 2004* provides the statutory framework for the management of Victoria's roads. This framework establishes a coordinated road management system for public roads, which includes the clear allocation of responsibilities between coordinating road authorities and responsible road authorities. Section 37 of the *Road Management Act 2004* specifies which public body is the responsible road authority for road and its road infrastructure (e.g. roadway, pathway, structures forming part of roadway or pathway) and road-related infrastructure (e.g. traffic signs and streetlights). This Bill expands the regulation-making power in that section so that regulations will be able to specify the responsible road authority for particular types of road infrastructure (infrastructure that forms part of the roadway). This increased flexibility will allow for regulations to specify a different responsible road authority (other than the default authority under the Act) to address circumstances such as municipal road over rail bridges which by default are the responsibility of the relevant local council, but where ongoing maintenance responsibilities more appropriately sit with the Head, Transport for Victoria or VicTrack.

The *Road Management Act 2004* requires that the approval of the coordinating road authority for a road must be obtained before works on that road can be undertaken, unless an exemption applies. The requirement to obtain consent is there to ensure that the works are conducted in a way that is safe, minimises traffic impacts, and doesn't negatively impact the integrity of the road. There are recurring issues with applications for approval, including that many are submitted with insufficient information for the coordinating road authority to properly assess them. Further, some applications are receiving deemed consent, that is consent is automatically granted after the expiry of the relevant period which is between three and 20 business days after an application is submitted. Deemed consent, in some cases, is not appropriate particularly when the coordinating road authority doesn't have enough information about the proposed works or how safety risks are to be managed.

This Bill will reform the consent for works process to limit who can apply for consent for works, so that only those entities with responsibility for the proposed works are able to apply. It will introduce a "stop the clock" mechanism to allow for the coordinating road authority to request additional information and to have sufficient time to assess the additional information once it is received. The Bill will remove the availability of deemed consent for higher risk applications. These include applications for works within freeways, and applications from entities that are not road authorities, providers of public transport, or utilities. The reforms in this Bill will also allow for regulations to specify what information must be included with an application, to ensure that it is clear to applicants what information a coordinating road authority must receive to make a timely and informed decision.

Continued improvements to the operation of local ports

The Bill increases the efficiency of local port operations to ensure these important environments are well maintained for future generations. Local port assets and infrastructure such as piers, jetties, navigation aids, vessel equipment and storage sheds all require regular inspection and maintenance. Under the *Port Management Act 1995*, local port managers may provide services to maintain and develop these types of assets outside their local port area. The Bill will clarify that they may also provide services within their own local port area to other bodies such as municipal councils. The Bill specifies that the types of services local port managers may provide include technical, advisory, maintenance and related services. These services will enable local port managers to better assist other bodies both within and outside the local port, who have responsibilities for marine assets and other infrastructure.

The cost of providing these services is also addressed in the Bill. The Bill will enable the Minister to permit a local port manager to charge a fee for the use of a facility or the provision of a service. The Minister may specify that fees be charged to recover costs, on a commercial basis, or calculated on another basis. While the Minister may permit commercial rates to be charged, this will not be mandated unless the Minister explicitly states fees must be set on a commercial basis. This means there will still be some flexibility for local port managers to exercise discretion to set different charges in different circumstances, for example, in emergency situations.

The Bill will also improve processes to remove abandoned vessels and other things from ports and waterways. Abandoned vessels and other items can cause environmental and safety risks in ports and negatively impact the aesthetic value of the area. The Bill will amend the *Port Management Act 1995* to improve the processes related to the removal of abandoned vessels and other things. The Bill will clarify the steps a port manager must follow to determine a vessel or thing as abandoned. The Bill will also outline certain requirements to move an abandoned vessel or thing, and to identify, locate and notify the owner. These amendments will enable port managers to act more efficiently while providing greater consistency and transparency in the management of abandoned vessels and other things in ports. Similar changes will be made to the equivalent provisions in the *Marine Safety Act 2010* with respect to the disposal of abandoned things by waterway managers.

The Bill also makes other minor amendments to the *Port Management Act 1995* and the *Marine Safety Act 2010* to improve the administration and operation of these Acts. The Bill will require the appointment of local port managers to be published in the Government Gazette. The Bill will also clarify liability for the actions of harbour masters when providing services to another port; clarify costs which may be retained and the order of priority of payment of any proceeds of sale of disposed vessels and things; and make other minor and technical amendments.

Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of transport legislation

This Bill also contains a range of amendments to improve the clarity, efficiency and effectiveness of transport legislation and to align Victorian transport legislation with broader objectives.

The Bill will clarify arrangements for responding to marine pollution incidents by amending the *Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988* to clarify that the Secretary, DTP's functions in relation to marine pollution incidents is to take action to deal with marine pollution incidents where the pollution is from a maritime source, while supporting other agencies in responding to marine pollution incidents that result from inland sources. The Bill will also ensure that Victoria is not left to bear a higher cost of any pollution response resulting from the escape of oil from an oil tanker, by removing the outdated liability limit for such incidents from the *Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988*, and relying instead on the internationally agreed liability limit given effect under Commonwealth legislation.

The Bill reforms the current legislation that establishes the investigative powers of the Chief Investigator Transport Safety by consolidating those powers into the *Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014* and repealing Part V of the *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983*. The Chief Investigator conducts an important public function of 'no-blame' investigations of transport incidents. The results and outcomes of investigations are an important input into public policy development relating to the safety of transport services and infrastructure. Accordingly, it is vital the Chief Investigator has clear and appropriate powers to conduct these investigations. The consolidation of the powers will improve clarity for the public and also deliver fixes to known deficiencies in the investigative powers of the Chief Investigator. Additionally, the Bill amends the *Transport Integration Act 2010* to provide that the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* does not apply to documents obtained by CITS in the course of investigations. Such a restriction is appropriate having regard to the nature of the investigations that the Chief Investigator conducts and the types of confidential information that the Chief Investigator is able to obtain using their powers.

The Bill contains other amendments to the *Transport Integration Act 2010* to provide that the CEOs of Safe Transport Victoria, the V/Line Corporation, and the North East Link State Tolling Corporation can be employed on a full time or a part time basis, and to streamline consultation processes for short-term appointments for an acting CEO of the V/Line Corporation.

This Bill also contains a range of other minor and technical amendments, including statute law revisions.

I commend the Bill to the house.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:29): On behalf of my colleague Ms Bath, I move:

That debate be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Adjournment

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (17:29): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Industry policy

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:29): (1735) My adjournment matter for is for the Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Regional Development Jaclyn Symes. I seek an update on how the newly launched *Victorian Industry Policy* will support businesses and workers in my region. The *Victorian Industry Policy* sets a clear framework to grow local industry, support emerging technologies and building a stronger, more self-sufficient economy. I ask the minister to outline what this means for Western Victoria.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:30): (1736) My adjournment matter tonight is for the attention of the Treasurer, and I could have asked this in the budget bill committee stage, but I did not. What I seek from the Treasurer are details and figures and breakdowns of the essential services levy – the collections of the fire services levy first and then the essential services estimates broken down by LGA. I did ask this in the committee stage previously on 15 May; the Treasurer came back with an extraordinary answer. I asked nicely, and she said she would get the figures, but she came back with:

Estimates of the revenue collected through the Emergency Services and Volunteers fund (formerly Fire Services ... Levy) from each municipality are not published.

Well, hooley dooley – we are asking for the estimates because they are not published.

Revenue estimates are calculated by property category, based on the number and value of properties and the rate levy that applies to each category.

We get that.

The ESVF revenue forecast for each property classification will be reported annually.

That is good. I am pleased about the classification category.

Revenue collected depends on the number, value, and composition of properties in each municipality.

Yes, we get that too. It does depend on the mix of properties, but you can compare it year to year; it does change from year to year, and that is what we want to look at. So what I am actually seeking is for the Treasurer to reconsider this matter and to release the estimates of revenue by municipality. When the committee stage was on, I did have an estimate that had been prepared by the municipality of Port Phillip, and they had worked out how much levy was likely to be collected out of their municipality. Now, I do not believe that other municipalities will not be doing precisely the same thing, so this is an entirely calculable figure. It is a reasonable way to present information. It will help us understand the amounts collected and where it is collected. I welcome the fact that it is going to be available by property classification, but that is not the same as by municipality. So I am asking the Treasurer: will you reconsider this and release the information that has been sought by municipality – that is, the essential services tax by municipality?

Professional engineers legislation

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:32): (1737) When the Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019 was introduced back in 2019, I was opposed to the idea. In fact I used several colourful metaphors to describe how bad I thought the legislation was. My view then, which has not changed, is that this legislation would offer no tangible benefit and simply create a tangle of red tape and drive up costs without any improvement in quality, efficiency or outcome. At the time, the Parliamentary Budget Office produced some costings for the Libertarian Party. This suggested that the cost of professional development could cost around \$6000 per year, with the cumulative cost of the scheme to the sector in the hundreds of millions of dollars per year. There were other issues that I anticipated, such as senior experts requiring their work to be overseen by people that are junior and less experienced simply because they have a particular qualification. These kinds of decisions should always have been covered by businesses and existing oversight arrangements.

This legislation is now up for review, and unsurprisingly many of the concerns that I had back in 2019 have actually come to pass. I have heard from professionals in the sector that compliance with this legislation is a headache, particularly for smaller firms. There are apparently issues with hydrologists, engineering geologists and other experts in their fields. The simple answer is to clearly repeal this legislation, but sadly I expect that this is unlikely to be the approach of the government. The next best solution will be to fix many problems that will no doubt be identified by people working on submissions in the coming weeks.

One small aspect of the legislation that could be amended to improve its function would be to make allowances for engineering geologists to be included. The Australian Institute of Geoscientists is well positioned to manage accreditation as they already have an accreditation scheme for registered professional geoscientists, which includes a category for geologists. My team has spoken with people in the sector that have told us that their non-inclusion had led to situations where experienced engineering geologists are required to be supervised by other engineers with less technical experience simply to comply with the law, with no other benefit. There is apparently a skills shortage in this area, and the imposition is slowing down projects and making them more expensive. The minister at the time did suggest that the intention of the scheme was to broaden the scope to include more people, but this does not seem to have happened. While my preference would be to simply repeal the legislation and remove some of the red tape tangle of this state, I will, on occasion, request the pragmatic compromise, and I request that the minister ensure that any submissions from the geotechnical field are given due consideration around how they could be incorporated into the scheme.

Gisborne Aquatic Centre

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:35): (1738) It is great to be able to give my adjournment tonight. The opposition seats are a little bit empty. Perhaps, given the time, there might be some other administrative items that are keeping them from being here, because it is great to be able to come in and raise an adjournment and make a contribution in this place. I actually want to acknowledge some of the great work of one Liberal member in this place in particular. There have been some that have said the Liberal Party have lost their way and that the federal election has shown that they are not staying in touch. But Ms Lovell, I want to congratulate you on your media release calling for an electric heat pump conversion at Gisborne Aquatic Centre. It is absolutely spot on. It states:

Wendy Lovell, Liberal Member for Northern Victoria, has called on the Victorian Government to fund electric heat pumps for the Gisborne Aquatic Centre.

Gisborne Aquatic Centre offers a heated pool, and it is increasingly popular with residents ... receiving almost 200,000 visitors in 2023–24.

The pool is currently heated by gas boilers, which are responsible for 18 per cent of Macedon Ranges Shire Council's scope 1 carbon emissions, and Council is taking action to reduce emissions.

...

To reduce emissions and lower costs, Macedon Ranges Shire Council is seeking to switch from gas boilers to electric heat pumps to heat the pool in Gisborne.

Ms Lovell, I absolutely agree with you. I congratulate you on pushing for electrification. It is interesting that Mr Davis calls electrification 'a war on gas' and says it does not lower costs. There does seem to be a little bit of a diversion of views, but a diversion of views is okay – the Liberal Party is a broad church. I may not be surprised if Mr Davis puts speaking notes in when we come back next week and if you are asked to put a small modular nuclear reactor in at the pool. You know, I have tried for some time to move the Liberal Party away from nuclear. I did a petition a year ago. We warned them. Anyway, at the same time as this was going on, the Commonwealth, the federal government, had the energy upgrades fund, with round 2 open. I know there are not so many Liberal federal members in Victoria, so you have got less colleagues to reach out to and ask for advice about what is going on in the federal Parliament. But I congratulate you. Your colleagues should follow suit.

My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is that the minister, through the department, make contact with the Macedon Ranges council to discuss options such as the Victorian energy upgrades scheme to assist with the cost of electrification and energy efficiency for the pool. We know that electrification and energy efficiency save money, and we know that they are good for reducing our emissions. I have always said that when it comes to action on climate change and when it comes to saving Victorians money, it should be bipartisan. We should not be political about this. So I stand and congratulate Ms Lovell, and I hope the rest of the Liberal Party can get on board too.

Omeo Highway

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:38): (1739) The adjournment matter that I have tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to investigate and provide me with a report on why it took VicRoads contractors several days to clear the Omeo Highway of snow during a peak holiday weekend when there were accurate weather forecasts of heavy snowfall. The King's Birthday long weekend is a time when many Victorian families like to get away for a holiday and visit the snow. Alpine operators were concerned that snowfall may be light this year, following a warm autumn, but the cold snap in recent weeks led to an accurate forecast that there would be heavy snowfall from Friday 6 June through to Sunday. Snow on Friday and Saturday had carpeted 5 or 6 kilometres of the Omeo Highway near Christmas Creek in a scenario that felt like *deja vu* from last year.

One bed and breakfast operator, who had guests coming to stay at his accommodation, said that a van was able to make it through on Saturday afternoon, but by Sunday morning the snow was too thick. About 1.5 kilometres in, the middle of the Omeo Highway now had impassable snow, and a visitor in a two-wheel drive, even with tyre chains, could not make it up the road. The accommodation operator called VicRoads several times on Sunday afternoon to complain that the road had not been cleared. The call reference number is 503484460. He was told by VicRoads that a crew was on its way to clear the snow, but they never turned up and the snow was not cleared. Instead a hundred kilometres of road was simply closed off, from Omeo through to Mitta, at about 4:30 pm on Sunday, forcing visitors to turn around and take a long detour.

There is a real concern among tourism operators and visitors travelling to the alpine regions that the Omeo Highway was not inspected or actively managed for snow risk. According to the Department of Transport and Planning's road management plan, obstructions like snow are expected to be cleared in 4 hours. However, in this case, just like last year, the only response was a late closure of the road long after the snow had become a problem. There is a worry that instead of properly inspecting and actively managing the road, contractors only reacted after complaints were made by operators and the local Omeo police. Maintenance crews finally turned up on Tuesday with a grader and six four-wheel drives, but by then the long weekend was already over and many had gone home.

This was a dangerous situation. Dozens of visitors in other locations became trapped in the snow that weekend and had to be rescued. It is unacceptable for the agency tasked with the management of these roads to abandon their responsibilities in this way. VicRoads and road maintenance contractors should have been ready for snow and prepared to act promptly to clear the roads, but their reaction was unacceptably slow. The minister has obviously not learned the lesson from last year, when I raised this very same issue on the same stretch of the Omeo Highway. This will keep happening until the minister holds contractors to account.

Jumps racing

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (17:41): (1740) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Racing, and the action that I seek is for a formal review into the death of racehorse Treasured Crown, who was killed in a jumps race following a catastrophic leg injury at Sandown on 1 June. Treasured Crown did not even last a single year as a jumps horse before he was killed. He had an undisclosed prior embargo and two significant racing breaks, known as spells, during his career – a clear indication that he had sustained a serious injury before his avoidable death. Yet despite these obvious red flags, he returned to compete in a high-risk jumps race.

To date four horses, including Treasured Crown, have been killed during the jumps racing season just this year in Victoria. Disturbingly, Racing Victoria does not include trial deaths in its official fatality count. Eight-year-old Wilewink and six-year-old Maatsuyker, who were both killed as a result of injuries sustained in jumps trials, are effectively invisible in the data that guides public reporting and, importantly, industry reform. Nine-year-old Zedstar's death occurred off the track following a race day injury at Pakenham on 13 April. Only after direct contact with his trainer has this been confirmed,

as no detail was included in the official stewards report beyond noting that he was lame post race. These omissions are unacceptable. They paint an incomplete and misleading picture of the true death toll of jumps racing in Victoria. One in every 41 horses to race in Victoria this year has died. When accounting for both races and trials, one in every 39 horses has died, and with only 47 per cent of the jumps calendar completed, we are on track to see as many as 10 fatalities by this season's end. This is not a margin of error, it is a pattern.

Racing Victoria claim to have implemented safety upgrades this season, including modified jumps, stricter eligibility criteria and mandatory competency trials. Yet these measures have failed to prevent fatalities, and Victoria remains the only state in the entire country that still permits jumps racing. The current season was supposed to reflect improved safety standards, but the statistics I have shared this evening tell a very different story. I call on the minister to initiate a formal review into the death of Treasured Crown and to consider a broader inquiry into these so-called safety measures, which are failing the very horses they are meant to protect.

Youth Fest

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:44): (1741) My adjournment is for the Minister for Youth in the other place. With the Youth Fest coming up in September, I am proud to say that the Allan Labor government has funded more than 500 Victorian Youth Fest events over the past five years. The action that I seek from the minister is to provide me with an update on local Youth Fest activities in my region.

Hepatitis

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:44): (1742) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health regarding the urgent need to address the high rates of hepatitis B and hepatitis C in Western Metropolitan Region. The action I seek is for the minister to address this extraordinary rate of hepatitis B and C exposure with the development of a comprehensive road map for improving diagnosis, care and treatment for those affected. When government fails to deliver accessible and effective health care, it is the most vulnerable members of our communities who suffer.

The high rates of hepatitis B and C in Western Metropolitan Region are deeply concerning and demand urgent action. Recent data reveals that three out of the four electorates with the highest hepatitis B rates are in my region, Western Metropolitan Region, with St Albans 180 per cent above the state average, Laverton 160 per cent above the state average and Kororoit 83 per cent above the state average. Four out of the 10 electorates with the highest rate of hepatitis C diagnosed in the past 25 years are also in Western Metro Region, with Kororoit 131 per cent above the state average, St Albans 95 per cent above the state average, Footscray around 90 per cent above the state average and Laverton the same.

Hepatitis B and C are bloodborne viruses that can cause long-term liver damage and lead to liver cancer if left untreated. Despite the availability of effective treatment, too few Victorians living with the hepatitis virus receive the care they need. Many come from marginalised communities and face barriers such as stigma, discrimination and an inaccessible health system. To tackle the growing hepatitis crisis in Victoria, particularly in the western region, we need compassionate community-driven responses. Let us start with raising awareness and improving education around hepatitis B and C, especially in areas where exposure is really high. Many people do not even know they are living with the virus until it is too late. We need to make easy access for these people to get treatment and testing by expanding nurse-led models of care and supporting local health initiatives. In the justice system hepatitis C is especially common, and a coordinated health response is urgently needed. Importantly, we must listen to and empower those with lived experience, people who understand the barriers firsthand and can help shape more effective, inclusive solutions.

Eliminating the hepatitis virus by 2030 is not just a health goal, it is a chance to save lives, reduce the burden of liver cancer and create a fairer, healthier Victoria for everyone. So again, I ask the minister

to provide a clear, transparent plan to address the high occurrence of hepatitis B and C in Western Metropolitan Region and Victoria as a whole.

Pacific Island Playgroup

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (17:47): (1743) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting the Pacific Island Playgroup in Broadmeadows, the only community-led, volunteer-driven playgroup servicing the northern suburbs of northern metro Melbourne, where a significant Pacific Islander diaspora resides. Community playgroups are the unsung heroes of child development. They spark curiosity, foster social and cultural connections and provide vital pathways for families to support their children's growth. These groups help shape young minds whilst connecting them to their multiethnic identities through language, song, dance, play and food. Much like grandparents provide love, guidance and a sense of belonging in a child's early life, community playgroups offer nurturing and safe environments for children and their caregivers. They play a vital role in supporting children's development and easing the transition into three- and four-year-old kindergarten.

Minister, you have invested a record \$14 billion into the Best Start, Best Life initiative, but investment into community playgroups continues to lag behind despite its proven value to families and children. The Pacific Island Playgroup has access to a qualified Pasifika early childhood educator but does not have the funds to remunerate them during school term for 3 hours a week. Like many community playgroups, they must self-fund programs and excursions, constraints that often lead to lost opportunities. There are currently no targeted and explicit funding opportunities tailored to specifically help community playgroups like this one to flourish and grow, yet demand is growing. What began with four children under the age of three now sees up to 15 children attending on any given Monday. While rooted in Pacific Island culture, this playgroup proudly welcomes non-Pasifika families who have adopted Pacific Island children, offering a meaningful way to maintain deep and authentic connections to their cultural heritage in a respectful community-led setting. Peak bodies like Playgroup Victoria do their best to uplift and resource these groups, but they too lack funding opportunities that community playgroups can apply for.

Families from diverse backgrounds need spaces where cultural capital can thrive. They deserve a space where they can access maternal health nurses and learn about their local support services that is culturally sensitive. This community playgroup has allowed so many mums to understand the process to enrol their children in three- and four-year-old kinder. It gives parents confidence in navigating the enrolment process, something they may not have done otherwise and may have completely missed out on. Minister, I look forward to introducing you to the special mums and families of the Pacific Island Playgroup in Broadmeadows and find ways you can support their work.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region sporting and recreational facilities

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:50): (1744) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to outline how the Allan Labor government's Local Sports Infrastructure Fund will benefit not only the community in Manningham but the community in the broader North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. This year Manningham City Council have received more than \$450,000 in funding through the 2024–25 local sports and infrastructure fund, delivering support for three significant initiatives. They are \$250,000 for outdoor redevelopment at Aquarena Aquatic and Leisure Centre in Doncaster, \$162,937 for LED sports field lighting at Domeney Reserve in Park Orchards and \$40,000 to support the development of the Manningham recreation strategy. These projects will deliver real, tangible benefits for local residents.

Aquarena's redevelopment will include a new 50-metre pool, a splash pad, toddler and family water play zones, improved change rooms, new spectator seating and a cafe. This investment ensures Aquarena remains a key destination for fitness, fun, community connections and of course swimming. The upgraded lighting at Domeney Reserve will support safe evening AFL participation and help

increase the use and capacity of this valued community facility. Meanwhile the new Manningham recreation strategy will provide a long-term vision for inclusive, accessible and sustainable sport and leisure infrastructure over the next decade. These investments support health, wellbeing, inclusion and community pride not just in Manningham but across the North-Eastern Metro Region. They enable more people to participate in sport, be active and connect locally. I thank the Allan Labor government for its ongoing commitment to strengthening local communities through targeted investment in sport and recreation infrastructure.

San Remo foreshore reserve

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:52): (1745) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment. I rise on behalf of the residents of San Remo and the San Remo Community Association, a passionate, proactive and community-minded group who are committed to improving and managing public land spaces on the wonderful San Remo peninsula. San Remo has a proud history of local stewardship, and for many, many years the committee of management has overseen the 27-hectare foreshore reserve. It has worked well, and it has been community-led and deeply accountable to local people, by local people.

But in 2019 that changed when the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action assumed responsibility. Since then, residents have reported that the condition of the foreshore has declined. With no dedicated management, maintenance has been sporadic and important works have stalled. Indeed, visiting the area recently and having a walk around with them, it is quite evident that there is much important basic work to be done.

In contrast, the San Remo Community Association has stepped up. They are capable incorporated volunteers, many of whom have been on previous committees of management. They have had the backing of the town. At a recent community meeting the proposal to return the foreshore management to this group was met with universal, unanimous support. Their vision is ambitious and forward looking. The association wants to deliver safer access to footpaths for elderly families and people with mobility issues; improved signage and public amenity to lift the precinct's appeal; new facilities, including a toilet block, saltwater pool, skate park and recreation centre; car parking improvements; and stabilisation works to address ongoing cliff erosion. Crucially, they propose using funds already held in a dedicated foreshore account generated through the San Remo foreshore caravan park for these works. They are self-starters.

Minister, in response to this proposal, your department stated that a committee of management is already in place, and the government is not seeking volunteers. This response is deeply disappointing and out of touch. It is not just a handful of helpers; this is a well-established committee, a community-based association with great knowledge, and this group has a plan. So the action I seek from the minister is for him to reconsider the current management arrangement and facilitate the management of the foreshore at San Remo to the San Remo Community Association in recognition of their strong community mandate and demonstrated capacity to deliver.

LGBTIQA+ equality

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:55): (1746) My adjournment this evening is for Minister Ward, the Minister for Equality, and the action that I am seeking is an update on how the government is promoting equality and supporting LGBTIQA+ communities in Victoria. We know in fact and we had confirmed again in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings just last week that Victoria is the only state or federal jurisdiction in Australia with an equality minister and the only jurisdiction that has an LGBTIQA+ commissioner as well. So it is especially good to see Minister Ward doing so well in the role, and I am keen to know more about some of the programs that we are running and that we are offering. Indeed just today we had the launch this morning of the LGBTIQA+ inclusive workplaces guidelines from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission in the south library, a very good event to have the minister, Attorney-General and others at as well, including Ro Allen and the commissioner himself, who was terrific to have.

We also know that the LGBTIQ+ sector strengthening program is supporting sustainable service delivery and the growth of the LGBTIQ+ community sector. There is \$800,000 in funding for various important organisations, including Transgender Victoria, Thorne Harbour Health, Switchboard Victoria and the Victorian Pride Centre, amongst a number of other recipients, and indeed we know how important these different agencies are. I recently had the pleasure of meeting the new CEO of the Victorian Pride Centre as well, who is also a producer on the *Saturday Magazine* at JOY FM, and I popped on for a quick chat over the weekend, which was really, really lovely. There are many, many important things in that wonderful service that JOY Media provides for not just Victoria's but Australia's queer community as well.

Another very significant event on the calendar for many this week was the MEDEAs, the second year of the Melbourne Excellence in Drag and Entertainment Awards, which was an absolute delight to join and be part of and indeed to see the absolutely inimitable Missy La'Minx hosting that award. We appreciate her coming out of retirement, a proud queen from the south-east I note as well. The event was run by the formidable Leasa Mann. Congratulations in particular to the winner of Drag Queen of the Year Lazy Susan, a very well deserved winner. Also congratulations to the very tenacious Bella Nitrate, the pioneering AFAB drag queen in Victoria, who won trailblazer of the year. There are so many things to celebrate in the community, and as we celebrate and focus on what is positive and what brings joy we also acknowledge the important work that still needs to be done. For those reasons, I ask the minister for the update.

Bus route 476

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:58): (1747) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport.

Members interjecting.

Moira DEEMING: Just so you know, senior Liberals were actually begging me to come up with a peace plan. First they tried threatening me and things like that. But just so you know, I have never, ever committed blackmail. That is just a lie. I was begged to clean up the mess made by Pesutto and his mates when they called me a Nazi sympathiser. Everyone was happy with the deal that I came up with. Yes, I handed over the five-point plan and yes, it included my preselection, but I never blackmailed anybody. Pesutto came back to Battin and said, 'Sure, Moira can have all of that, including her preselection, but only if she pays a million dollars of my debt.' So you can stop with that kind of a lie.

Members interjecting.

Moira DEEMING: Perhaps some people really need to get a hobby. I hear there is a former Premier sized vacancy in golf.

Anyway, back to my adjournment matter. Constituents are fed up with route 476 from Watergardens to Moonee Ponds. What should be a straightforward journey has become a slow-moving ordeal, sometimes taking over an hour because the route –

Members interjecting.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, if members make comment across the chamber, they need to be in their place.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order. Please can we have a bit of quiet in the chamber. Mrs Deeming to continue her adjournment matter without interruption.

Moira DEEMING: So what should be a straightforward journey has become a slow-moving ordeal – and yes, there are parallels. Sometimes it takes over an hour because the route is clogged with so many stops. It is actually ridiculous – you should look at it on the map. People trying to get to work and school and appointments are being made late day after day. It is not a transport network at all. So

the action that I seek is that the minister conduct a serious review about the stops configuration so that they can deliver a faster and more efficient service for the west.

Upfield and Craigieburn rail lines

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (18:00): (1748) I too have an adjournment matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place, Gabrielle Williams, but mine is all about the Upfield and Craigieburn lines – that is right – because for my community they are more than just rail routes, they are the lifeline for people of the northern suburbs. Whether it is the residents heading to work or school, doing the weekly shop, going to their medical appointments or simply enjoying all the fabulous things that our great city has to offer, these train lines are vital to their daily lives. They serve the growing and vibrant communities of Melbourne’s north and ensure that they have reliable, frequent and accessible services. It is absolutely essential, and that is why I was absolutely thrilled to share that they are expanding services to both the Upfield and the Craigieburn lines. It is huge news for the thousands of people who rely on these trains every single day. Increased frequency means shorter wait times, less crowding and a more reliable journey – something that I know that every commuter deserves. It also supports local jobs and helps reduce congestion on our roads, which of course benefits the environment and the rest of the community.

President, you will know that I have spoken to many residents who are pleased to hear about these improvements, but they also want to know that their voices are being heard and that decision-makers understand the real everyday impacts of these changes. I am seeking action from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure today that she join me on a journey along the Upfield line, and I would welcome an opportunity to show her firsthand the communities that depend on these services and to highlight just how much the uplift in services will improve lives across Melbourne’s north. I thank you for the opportunity to make an adjournment this evening.

Donnybrook Road, Kalkallo

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:02): (1749) This will be my last adjournment for some time, given I will probably be missing the next couple of sitting weeks due to a bit of paternity leave – it seems to be becoming a regular occurrence. I thought, ‘What better way to give my last adjournment in a while than on Donnybrook Road in my electorate?’ So my adjournment is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it is to get on with properly duplicating Donnybrook Road. I have made a promise to my community – the communities of Mickleham, Kalkallo and beyond – to raise Donnybrook Road every single sitting week in the Parliament. We know that Donnybrook Road is an old farm track. The bridge over the Hume is one lane each way. The government even reduced the speed limit on the Hume going north, from 100 kilometres an hour to 80 kilometres an hour, such was the congestion – so they are slowing the entire state down. Now they are also putting in some traffic lights. So I am seeking some information about the further traffic lights they are putting in southbound as you come into the Mitchell Street roundabout, because we also know that this government has failed when it comes to building infrastructure before and as people move in, not after. It was the Liberal Party when in government that duplicated the Mickleham side of Donnybrook Road, because do you know what? We love developer contribution plans – sitting down a developer and saying, ‘You owe us this much tax, so we’re going to work together, and we want this road duplicated because if we don’t duplicate it now, it’s going to be a traffic nightmare.’ And what did Labor do when they came into government? They scrapped that policy. So on the Kalkallo side the government takes all the stamp duty revenue and all the developer contributions from Kalkallo and Donnybrook and sends it to the \$35 billion – probably \$50 billion – Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs.

The people of Kalkallo, Donnybrook and Mickleham are propping up the Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs rather than getting their duplication of Donnybrook Road. The government have said they have got \$125 million to duplicate Donnybrook Road. All they are doing is blowing up a roundabout that they only recently upgraded in 2023. What a waste it is to do that. We still do not know, and I seek the action of the minister to explain, how much of the \$125 million is a state

government contribution, because the state government contribution to the road blitz was only \$200 million. The minister needs to explain herself and finally get on with properly duplicating Donnybrook Road.

Responses

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (18:06): Ms Ermacora raised a matter for the Minister for Industrial Relations. Mr Davis raised a matter for the Treasurer. Mr Limbrick raised a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Mr McIntosh raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Ms Lovell raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Ms Purcell raised a matter for the Minister for Racing. Mr Berger raised a matter for the Minister for Youth. Mr Luu raised a matter for the Minister for Health. Ms Terpstra raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport. Ms Bath raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. Mr Galea raised a matter for the Minister for Equality. Mrs Deeming raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, as did Ms Watt. Mr Mulholland raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure.

Ms Gray-Barberio raised a matter for me as Minister for Children in relation to the Pacific Islander Playgroup in Broadmeadows. I am a great advocate of playgroups. They are an integral part of our children and family services system, and our government does invest significantly in supported playgroups. Ms Gray-Barberio raised issues in relation to supported playgroups as well as community playgroups, and I will take offline a discussion with her around the different types of funding that may or may not be available for the different types of playgroups. Can I also say as a former member in the other place for the district of Pascoe Vale I know the Islander community around Melbourne's inner north very well. I have spent much time with them and their families over many years, as I know the member for Broadmeadows does on a very regular basis. I have always been grateful for the leadership of the families of the Islander communities within that part of Melbourne and indeed the example that they set not just in children and family services but in community services more broadly. They do amazing work in their communities and across the community, as Ms Gray-Barberio acknowledged, but not just within their own community; they open up their support services and community functions to many who are not of Islander communities but who will also benefit from the amazing supports and services that they do offer.

Playgroups are an integral part of our system. If my schedule permits, I am more than happy to again engage with the Islander community in Broadmeadows and their great advocate in the member for Broadmeadows as well. The member for Broadmeadows and I often speak with families across Melbourne's north and particularly in Broadmeadows on a daily basis. We are inspired by their work, and of course we are happy to and privileged to continue to work with them. I will refer those other matters accordingly.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:09 pm.