

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 29 July 2025**



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**Tuesday 29 July 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Condolences*

**Hon Brian James Dixon**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:04): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death on 9 July 2025 of the Honourable Brian James Dixon and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of St Kilda from 1964 to 1982 and as Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation from 1973 to 1982, Minister of Social Welfare from 1976 to 1979, Minister of Housing from 1979 to 1981 and Minister for Employment and Training from 1981 to 1982.

I would like to speak to the motion on behalf of the government. Brian Dixon lived a life of exceptional breadth, purpose and service. He was an athlete, a legislator, a minister and a change maker, a man whose legacy spans sport, health, community and culture. Mr Dixon's early life was marked by loss and resilience. He grew up in modest circumstances, losing his father as a teenager and helping his mother make ends meet by carting wood and delivering newspapers. These early experiences shaped a lifelong work ethic and deep commitment to the wellbeing of others.

Brian's first chapter of public life was on the football field. He played 252 games for the Melbourne Football Club, including five premierships. A fierce competitor and renowned ball winner, he was Melbourne's best and fairest in 1960 and was later honoured in the AFL hall of fame and named in Melbourne's team of the century. He also coached North Melbourne. Then, not even following this but while still playing top-level football, Mr Dixon entered Parliament. He was elected in 1964 as the member for St Kilda, and over the next 18 years he served in a number of ministerial roles, which I foreshadowed earlier.

He launched the groundbreaking Life Be In It campaign, encouraging Australians to embrace physical activity long before preventative health became a policy norm. The campaign, with its memorable slogan and iconic figure named Norm, inspired a generation to get off the couch and move more, a message that remains relevant today. Equally significant was his contribution to road safety. As the chair of the Road Safety Committee, Mr Dixon led the world's first legislation mandating the wearing of seatbelts. It was bold reform at the time and it faced lots of resistance, but we know it saved lives then and continues to save lives now. It stands as one of the most impactful legislative reforms in Victoria's history. Mr Dixon was also involved in reforms that addressed complex social issues. He advocated for the legal regulation of prostitution, the abolition of capital punishment and improved access to housing and education. He believed in practical, people-focused policy, and he was not afraid to lead change, even if it was at odds with his party.

Outside of Parliament Mr Dixon championed community sport, promoted international development in Australian Rules football and ran 10 marathons, founding the Melbourne Marathon Spartans to celebrate endurance and community sport. Those who knew Brian speak of his positivity, his charisma and his sheer drive. His daughter Judy spoke to me of this competitive streak, whether on the footy field, around a Monopoly board or in family races around the house. He was fun. Known for his singing, dancing and warmth, he did not sweat the small stuff. He brought people along with him and stood up for what was right, and in doing so he changed lives. I have gotten to know Judy through her work with Mansfield Autism Statewide Services, and she certainly carries on her father's legacy for compassion and being a people-centred person that champions the voices of those less able, with the ability to turn advocacy into lasting change. He spent his later years in Jamieson with his wife Carmel, remaining active and connected to family, teammates and friends.

On behalf of the Victorian government and this Parliament I extend our deepest condolences to Mr Dixon's family and loved ones and acknowledge his contribution to the Parliament of Victoria as well as the community of Victoria.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:08): I am pleased to rise and associate the opposition with this condolence motion. Brian Dixon was somebody who was well known to many of us within the Liberal Party in particular and a number of people across the broader community. He was obviously a very successful minister, having been Minister for Employment and Training from 1981 to 1982; Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation from 1973 all the way through until 8 April 1982; Minister of Housing, as has been pointed out, from 1979 to 1981; Minister of Social Welfare from 1976 to 1979; and Assistant Minister of Education from 1973 to 1976.

But he was much more than that – a very successful person who was prepared to lead on so many issues. As member for St Kilda, there are still significant numbers of people who talk about Brian Dixon and his impact on the area. He was available to people, he was engaged at a community level, but at the same time he was a very significant footballer. Not only being elected while a footballer and playing successfully VFL football, he was also a person who was prepared to innovate in a number of areas – the Life Be In It campaign is the best known of those – and his innovations in those areas of public health campaigns I think have blazed a very significant trail for many in our community. He obviously had also, in more recent years, been up in the Mansfield region, and Ms Lovell no doubt will say more on how his contribution to that community was also significant.

I put on record our regrets at his passing and the significant impact on his family, and we certainly pass on our best to them. He was a person that, when you look back, was an all-rounder, a person who was able to not only be a very successful politician but also stand up for significant causes. He fell out famously – as people will know – with Henry Bolte, who had a very strong view on many matters, and he fell out on the issue of the death penalty. He was also a person who was able to work with his colleagues. Dick Hamer put him into cabinet, and he was a very successful cabinet minister.

I would say here: a footballer, a local identity, a person with a very significant reach in the community, an innovator and somebody of great principle. He will be missed, and I think that the community is poorer for his passing.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:11): I rise to associate myself with this motion as well and to celebrate the life of Brian Dixon. Brian Dixon was elected to this place in June 1964. He served here for 18 years until 2 April 1982. In fact in his first four years, he balanced his time as a member of Parliament in the Legislative Assembly with a career in football. He was a full-time footballer and a full-time politician. I cannot see those two things going hand in hand today, but he did manage to balance those responsibilities and was very successful as a footballer. In fact in his first year in Parliament in 1964, he not only entered Parliament by winning a seat in Parliament but also won a premiership with the Melbourne football team. He was a member of five premiership teams for Melbourne, and he played for Melbourne for four years while serving in the Victorian Parliament before retiring from his beloved Demons to concentrate more on his parliamentary career.

During his time in Parliament he held the positions of Minister for Employment and Training; Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation; Minister of Housing; Minister of Social Welfare; and Assistant Minister of Education. He served as a member of the Road Safety Committee from 5 December 1967 until 16 April 1973 – a significant period. He also served as a member of the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee from 1967 to 1970.

As I said, Brian was a footballer with the Melbourne football team. He actually held the record for playing the most games for Melbourne for a number of years. He played 252 games between 1954 and 1968 and, as I said, was a member of five premiership teams.

Brian was what I would describe as a true Liberal. He was caring, compassionate and progressive. He always put the best interests of not only his constituents but also the entire population of Victoria first.

He was passionate about people and had a genuine interest in everyone he met. His passion for people extended to the health and welfare of all Victorians and would lead to some of his greatest achievements as a member of Parliament.

The foundations of Brian's passion for good Liberal governance, progressive thinking and delivering for people were laid out in Brian's maiden speech in July 1964. Most MPs today choose to use their maiden speech to introduce themselves to the Parliament, including their path to politics and their career history, as well as thanking their many volunteers in their local branches and in the state executive of their party. Brian chose to use his maiden speech not to talk about himself and his achievements but to talk about the things the Bolte government were doing to deliver services and infrastructure that benefited Victoria in education, in health, in housing and in welfare. He pointed out that in 1964 a third of Victoria's population were under 15 years of age and more than half of the population were under 30, and he spoke proudly of the fact that to that point the Bolte government had built 19 more secondary schools than had been built in the entire history of Victoria. That is not just 19 schools, it is 19 more than had been built between 1856 and 1955, so the Bolte government had more than doubled the number of secondary schools in Victoria between 1955 and 1964. The Bolte government were also in that time spending more per annum on education than any other state, something that we do not do today.

He spoke of the basis for a third university in Victoria having already been laid by the Bolte government, he spoke of the importance of education to the future wealth and prosperity of Victoria and its people, he spoke about investing in people and he spoke about how those most likely to be unemployed were those who were unskilled. He put forward ideas about how we could invest in those people to provide them with the education, training and skills that would allow them to build better lives. He spoke about welfare and the need to support those who were less fortunate, elderly or unemployed, and he spoke about the Housing Commission of Victoria and the work of the Bolte government, which had invested in what was called the slum reclamation project. That was because in many areas of Melbourne, particularly around Carlton, Collingwood, Richmond and South Melbourne, people had been living in substandard and unhygienic conditions in what could only be described as slums. The Bolte government invested £18 million – which I just had the library do the calculations on, which would be \$618,241,486 today – to reclaim those areas where the slums were and build modern apartments for families. Those towers have served our state well for the past 70 years and are now once again the subject of a redevelopment project.

Brian also spoke about democracy and the importance of an informed public. He said for democracy to survive there must be a well-informed public opinion, but people do not bother to inform themselves about subjects which are remote to them. Therefore we as the leaders of the people of this state must use the press, the radio, the television and all other forms of mass personal communication to inform people concerning politics and to ensure that it will not become a subject which is remote to them. That is something that worries me today, because I think that people have disengaged, particularly with state politics, and when people disengage with state politics they actually have things done to them and not for them. It is up to us to re-engage people so that they do have a better understanding of what is going on in our state in this place and what political parties have to offer them.

In his maiden speech Brian demonstrated that he was someone who would leave a lasting legacy that would improve the lives of all Victorians, and he did. Some of Brian's greatest achievements include the introduction of compulsory seatbelts in Victoria, and this was an issue that he actually championed through his work with the Road Safety Committee. That initiative has saved many thousands of lives in Victoria.

He also introduced the Life Be In It campaign, which was an initiative of his as our minister for sport and rec. Sport and physical fitness was a lifetime passion for Brian and something he pursued post politics. The Life Be In It campaign, with Norm as its figurehead, inspired a generation of Victorians to become more physically active. Life Be In It was also a lifetime passion for Brian – both the campaign itself and also in the way that he lived his life.

Brian was also a passionate advocate for the decriminalisation of prostitution, and this was a position he took because he saw firsthand the problems that illegal prostitution was having in his electorate in St Kilda. The library actually came up with a position paper that Brian wrote on prostitution and massage parlours in May 1980. Brian had actually successfully managed to have a motion passed at the Liberal Party state council in March of 1979 that read:

that this State Council recommends that there should be legislation to the effect that premises for the purpose of prostitution be able to operate only in non-residential areas and subject to stringent controls, and that thereafter more powers be made available for the control of prostitutes soliciting from the streets and utilizing illegal premises for the purpose of prostitution.

As I said, Brian was progressive enough to recognise that prostitution was the oldest profession in the world. It was not going away, no matter how illegal you made it, and making it illegal actually only caused more problems. It meant that women who were not prostitutes but who were walking the streets in St Kilda were subject to guttercrawlers approaching them and making them feel unsafe. It meant that pimps were living off the earnings of vulnerable women. Most importantly, the change that he wanted to put in place was to make sure that the sex workers themselves were safe.

In March 1979, as I said, that motion was successfully moved at the Liberal Party state council, which meant that Brian then put together his paper making recommendations about how we could decriminalise prostitution in Victoria and make that profession safer for the women, the sex workers who worked in it, and make it also a highly regulated industry. His summary of that document said:

It is recommended that prostitution be permitted to function in massage parlours in prescribed areas in Victoria subject to controls and that existing sanctions against street prostitution should be retained.

So he was a very progressive man.

He was also someone who often had controversial views, and he was not afraid to put them forward. As Mr Davis said, he clashed with Sir Henry Bolte over the hanging of Ronald Ryan, and his position did not go down well with the Premier or with some of his colleagues in his party room because it was against the party position. Whilst I do not remember Brian actually making that stand, I do have some very fleeting memories of this time, because it was the first real political debate that I actually witnessed, and it happened in my own home. My mother and my Uncle Carl had very differing views on the hanging, and I can remember a very heated debate at our holiday home in Anglesea one night, and we were all scurried off to bed. Uncle Carl and Mum were going at it, hammer and tongs, arguing their cases, and I remember getting up in the morning and my Uncle Carl had used my mother's magic orange lipstick – that was the colour she used; it was the 1960s. In magic orange lipstick, written on the mirror in our bathroom was 'Hang Ryan. Australia out of Vietnam'. I can still remember that they were the words on that mirror, and I was only very, very young. They obviously had a difference of opinion about Australia being in Vietnam as well, but the reason I remember it was for the hanging of Ronald Ryan.

In 1969 Brian also had views on the date of Australia Day and whether it should be on 26 January. Now, I think his views for moving the date might be very different to the views of those who want to move the date today, because he believed it should actually be moved to 7 February. And he said 7 February is a much more appropriate day because that was the day the colony was officially inaugurated, and if we make it 7 February, the schoolchildren can be told about it properly. So he was a person who had many controversial views. Post politics Brian continued his passion for sport, for people and for communities. One of the things I forgot to say was that not only did he play football while he was in this place, but for two years he actually coached North Melbourne while he was the member for St Kilda, so he was a multitasking man and he continued his passion for sport and politics and community. Post politics he was involved in many, many organisations like the Trim and Fitness International Sport for All Association. He travelled the world trying to establish AFL football in other countries and was actually the president of AFL football in South Africa. He also went up to Sydney to establish the Sydney Swans as an administrator when the Sydney Swans were first established.



When he returned to Victoria he settled in Mansfield, in my electorate. Brian was a much-loved member of the Mansfield community. He was active in the community. He was heavily involved in the tennis club in particular, I remember. He also, right up until very recently, still swept the path outside the church every Sunday morning to ensure that it looked neat and tidy, because he wanted his community to be a place that people could be proud of.

Brian was also still active in the Liberal Party right up until the time of his death. His wife Carmel is a very active member of the branch in Mansfield and is someone who we all have a great love for. We will miss Brian dreadfully in the Liberal Party, and he will be missed as a member of our community as well. I extend my deepest condolences to his wife Carmel, to his five surviving children and also to his one child who predeceased him, Anthony. To Jenny, Judy, Jamie, Jono and Bae – his five surviving children – and his 11 grandchildren, I extend my deepest condolences.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): I rise to make a contribution to this condolence motion, and I also extend my sincere condolences to Brian's family and his many friends. As we have heard from members, Brian made an enormous contribution to the community. The Honourable Brian James Dixon was born on 20 May 1936 and died on 9 July 2025, aged 89.

I knew Brian through the association with my father, when they both served in this place in the Hamer governments, and I do remember him as someone that my father and family would speak of often. But as members have said, he was very connected to the community that he was living in, whether it was as the member for St Kilda, as Mr Davis and Ms Lovell have highlighted, or as the Leader of the Government in his later years, as Ms Lovell and others have also said. He was very connected to those communities and was very involved in a range of community activities. I saw Brian not long ago in this place when he came in and he met with a number of us. He was always someone who was incredibly warm, was always pleased to be speaking to you, understood what was going on and was very much involved in the day-to-day politics but also you personally and your family involvement. From those elements, he was somebody who was quite extraordinary.

Unfortunately, I was not able to be at his service last Friday. But from what was said in reports that I have read, he had an extraordinary life that has led to an extraordinary legacy and one that has been spoken about, whether it was the Life Be In It campaign, which was a very simple and effective campaign that had a massive impact – it was a very powerful message and one that really contributed to the health and wellbeing of Victorians, and it resonated right across the country – or the many areas of responsibilities that he had, which others have highlighted, with the various ministries that he had. The lasting legacy, one that he took up, which has been mentioned by speakers, is mandatory seat belts. That not only was a first in Australia and Victoria but also the world. It led to a very lasting legacy and one that has been recognised internationally.

As members have said, Brian Dixon was an extraordinary man. He had extraordinary talents, whether that was on the football field or in this place. Coming into this Parliament he was still playing for Melbourne, an extraordinary feat, and contributing both through that professional sporting career as well as the professional political career that he had. He was an extraordinary man. He did leave an extraordinary legacy – one that Victorians can be very proud of. The Life Be In It campaign, and the seat belt initiative are very lasting. Also, I know members of the Melbourne football team, and the extraordinary contribution he made to the AFL and to that football team leaves a lasting legacy for that team and those members. I extend my condolences. I said it at the outset: he was a man of great capacity, and he will be greatly missed.

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

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

**The PRESIDENT:** Proceedings will now be suspended for 1 hour as a further mark of respect.

**Sitting suspended 12:33 pm until 1:36 pm.**

***Bills***

**Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025**

**Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025**

**Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

**State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025**

***Royal assent***

**The PRESIDENT** (13:36): I have a message from the Governor, dated 24 June:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

**21/2025** Appropriation (2025–2026) Act 2025

**22/2025** Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Act 2025

I have received a further message from the Governor, dated 24 June:

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

**23/2025** Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2025

**24/2025** State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2025

***Questions without notice and ministers statements***

**Early childhood education and care**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:37): (965) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, in 2022 the Ombudsman recommended that the government strengthen the working with children check system. Since then, horrific allegations of child sexual abuse in Victorian childcare centres have come to light. Why did the government fail to respond to this recommendation and fail to implement it?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:37): I thank Ms Crozier for her question, although at the outset I would point out that it is misdirected. Under the supplement to the general order effective 23 May 2025 the Worker Screening Act is jointly and severally administered by the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, this is about the protection of children, and the minister is responsible for children. She has that portfolio. Given this is a very serious issue, is she saying that she has had no input into this serious thing, given the media commentary that she has made in recent days?

**Lizzie Blandthorn:** On Ms Crozier's point of order, President, I would point out that the Department of Education is a client of the working with children check system in the same way that every other part of government that works with children is a client of the working with children check system. I would urge Ms Crozier and the opposition to direct their questions to the appropriate minister.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think we got to the point from both Ms Crozier and the minister of debating the point of order. But as far as the substance of Ms Crozier's point of order goes, as I have stated, members have every right to direct a question to any minister. The minister has the right to point out that that particular question should be directed to another minister. So I am not too sure –

**David Davis:** Further to the point of order, President, ministers are also required to answer questions about matters with which they are connected, including matters that they have commented on. So their own comments and their own matters of commentary are available for questioning. I would ask you to take that into account in this matter, because the minister has made comment about these matters.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think it is pretty clear that members can ask questions to ministers as to their responsibilities as far as their remit goes in the ministries they hold. Getting back to my response to Ms Crozier, that does not stop members from asking questions to that minister, but the minister has every right to point out that the question should be directed under the remit of a different minister. That is I think the point we are at now.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a further point of order, President, I note that a letter to the minister from the Premier reads:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Alongside your responsibilities as coordinating minister for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, your principal portfolio responsibilities include child protection, child information sharing, child safeguarding, including child safe standards, and the reportable conduct scheme.

I do think there is an element of the minister having responsibility for this very important issue. I find it astounding that she is failing to want to answer this very important question based on her own portfolio responsibilities for children.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is more of a point of debate than a point of order. Given the minister's answer, I cannot see how a supplementary can be asked of that minister.

#### Working with children checks

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:41): (966) My question is again to the Minister for Children. Minister, on 27 August 2024 in this place I asked the then Attorney-General about reports that 157,000 working with children check applicants did not have their status notified to nominated organisations due to a systems error, including 69 applicants who were banned from child-related work. At the time the Attorney did not respond appropriately to that important question, so I ask you: as Minister for Children what did you do to follow up on this serious bungle that was first identified in 2022?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:41): I would again note – and Ms Crozier in her question actually noted – that the working with children check system is the responsibility of the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services, as evidenced by the fact that in previously asking the question you correctly asked it of the Attorney-General.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I would again point out to those opposite that if they have questions in relation to the working with children check, then the appropriate person to ask those questions is the Attorney-General or the Minister for Government Services, depending on the nature of your question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Jaclyn Symes:** On a point of order, President, we are more than happy to answer the questions. If they would like to direct the question to Minister Erdogan, he could take it on behalf of the Attorney-General and provide an answer. This is not about a minister trying to avoid a topic. I think she is quite ready to respond to questions, but it is a responsibility of the opposition to direct their questions to the correct minister. We are actually trying to help in that regard.

**Sonja Terpstra:** On the point of order, I am having trouble hearing what ministers are saying because of the stream of abuse, and also Ms Crozier needs to direct her comments through you, President, rather than hurling abuse at ministers. I cannot hear. There is a range of things that are going on. Those opposite need to understand that if they actually direct their questions to the right minister, it might help.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think it has been made pretty clear by previous presiding officers in this role, as far as rulings go – and it is in the standing orders – that the areas that ministers can be asked questions about are mainly in the responsibility which they hold. I thought about the question. I feel like a previous minister in a completely different portfolio was asked the question ‘And what did you do?’ I am wondering if that is within the remit of the minister as well. I am happy for you to put the question, and the minister can answer as she sees fit, which she did.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:45): I find this completely unacceptable. Nevertheless, Minister, in an answer provided to me on 3 October 2024 following the referral of the non-response from the then Attorney, the Minister for Government Services responded by saying:

... attempts were made to contact the 69 applicants who were not approved to work with children.

Minister, I ask: were any of those 69 applicants found to be working in early childhood centres?

**The PRESIDENT:** I have a concern.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis! I think we should respect that this is a very sensitive issue. It is a question around an answer from a minister that does not even hold this minister’s portfolio that was in a response that was given by a different minister, and this minister does not hold that portfolio as well.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** It is just a fact. But in view of the chamber working in a collegial way, I will let the minister respond as she sees fit.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:46): Again, as Ms Crozier has answered in her own question, under the supplement to the general order effective 23 May 2025, the Worker Screening Act is jointly and severally administered by the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services, as evidenced by the fact – that is why she asked her questions in that direction in the first instance and got answered in the first instance. If she has subsequent questions, they should be directed at those ministers. That is where she should direct them.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:47): I move:

That the minister’s answers be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **Ministers statements: early childhood education and care**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:47): I rise regarding sickening allegations against an individual who worked in childcare centres that emerged over the winter break. At the outset it is important that we are all mindful that there is an active police investigation, and I am advised that I cannot speak to those individual circumstances because any statements we make could jeopardise the process for justice. However, what I can say is that alongside every Victorian I remain horrified by these allegations. It is pure evil. It was only 18 months ago that I was dropping off my own child at child care each morning, and I feel the same anxieties and understand the trust that families make when they ask –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Sorry, President. I cannot hear myself, and this is a particularly sensitive matter. I would appreciate –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** We are going to reset the clock. The minister was not being provocative.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** No, she was not. She was not provoking the opposition or any other member in this chamber. Like any other statement, unless the person doing the contribution actually does provoke something, obviously, then it is expected that the minister is heard in silence. I will ask the minister to start from the beginning, please.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I rise regarding sickening allegations against an individual who worked in childcare centres that emerged over the winter break. At the outset it is important that we are all mindful that there is an active police investigation. I am advised that I cannot speak to those individual circumstances because any statements we make could jeopardise the process for justice. However, what I can say is that alongside every Victorian I remain horrified by these allegations. It is pure evil. It was only 18 months ago that I was dropping off my own child at child care each morning. I feel the anxieties, and I understand the trust when families ask others to help with the care of their children. Victorians must be able to trust that their children are safe in child care.

Child care is regulated as part of a national system, which is important. It is a system bound together by a national framework, the national quality standards, national law and consistent regulation. This is critical, and a huge amount of national reform is underway. However, the nature of the federation means this takes time. But in Victoria we have taken immediate steps. This includes implementing the first phase of a worker register and implementing a personal device ban by 26 September. The workforce register is already in train using established systems, and the first phase will capture over 90 per cent of employees, including casual employees in long day care and kinder. Registration began last week, and already 3456 additional workers have been registered. We have also commissioned an urgent review into child safety in early childhood education and childcare settings and the working with children check in Victoria, and the review is focused on getting advice about the national work that is already progressing and seeing what else we can expedite in Victoria in addition to the register and devices ban already being implemented. The report is due back on Friday 15 August, and we will implement every recommendation.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:51): I move:

That the minister's statement that she has just made be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Early childhood education and care**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:51): (967) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, children's safety in childcare settings is currently regulated and overseen by QARD, the quality assessment and regulation division, and the Commission for Children and Young People. While they play important roles in regulation and oversight, QARD is ultimately accountable to the government of the day, and the commission's primary role is to provide advice to ministers and departments, not the Parliament or the public. This structure means that the government is marking its own homework, raising serious questions about whether these bodies can operate impartially, transparently and without political influence. After recent allegations of serious and systemic abuse in early childhood settings and the erosion of public trust that you alluded to, Minister, how do you justify to Victorian parents that we do not need a truly independent oversight body to keep our babies and our toddlers safe?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am just concerned it is asking for an opinion. If you like, you can try and rephrase it.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO:** Sure, I will rephrase it, President. Minister, will you look into providing a truly independent oversight body, aka an independent safety watchdog in early child care?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:53): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her question. As I indicated in my ministers statement, our rapid review will look at a number of things, including the way in which our regulatory system works together. And as –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Sorry, President. Again, I cannot hear myself when Ms Crozier continues to interject as she does.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can we reset the clock.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I am attempting to answer Ms Gray-Barberio's very legitimate and relevant question within my portfolio, and I would appreciate the opportunity to do so without the interjections of those opposite.

As has been clearly set out within the terms of reference of the rapid review that the Premier and I announced following the sickening allegations in relation to the accused, our review will identify options to improve interactions between regulatory schemes, including information sharing between regulators and agencies both within Victoria and across jurisdictions. That includes many of the schemes and frameworks and whatnot that Ms Crozier included in her point of order but did not include in her question and seemed to be confusing with the working with children check. But the CCYP is a statutory and independent body that is not answerable to government and in many instances provides recommendations to government that government is then answerable to the commission in relation to.

But Ms Gray-Barberio does raise a relevant point in relation to how our schemes better work together. She also raises a relevant question in relation to the status of the early childhood regulator. As I have indicated publicly in recent weeks, this was something that government was already looking at and continues to be looking at and which indeed we have asked our reviewers to look at as to what the options are. We will not pre-empt the review, but certainly from our perspective we want to ensure that we have the best forces and organisational structures to ensure that in the implementation of the national framework, the national quality standards and the national law there is the appropriate regulation and oversight of those. I would also stress – and I had, previous to these current matters, raised this point at the national education ministers meeting – that regulation was something that –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** You have not even listened to what I am about to say, which is that our regulators were previously partly resourced by the Commonwealth government. I, as did other ministers from around the jurisdictions, raised with the Commonwealth that support from them to our state regulators in relation to the implementation of the national framework, the national quality standards and the national laws. We will continue to do that work. We will not pre-empt the review. It is a rapid review. It will report on 15 August, and we look forward to having further conversations about these matters.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Before I call Ms Gray-Barberio, I think someone who asked a question and wants to interject loudly during the answer to the question is one thing, but interjecting loudly to the question from another member who wants to listen to the answer is something else. So I would ask

Ms Gray-Barberio to ask the supplementary, and I would appreciate her being heard without people drowning out the minister's answer.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:57): Minister, I do recognise the rapid review that is in place at the moment. However, the terms of reference of this rapid review do not look at the regulator which is responsible for monitoring and ensuring children's safety. I just want to point that out. I am very concerned that that has not been included in Labor's rapid review in response to one of the most horrific cases of child sexual abuse. Minister, I think you have answered part of my supplementary question, but could you provide a clear timeframe of when this government will have an outcome regarding the establishment of the independent early childhood safety watchdog so that Victorian parents can have some kind of transparency about how your government is dealing with this?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:58): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her supplementary. I would at the outset, though, say it is disingenuous to suggest that we are excluding consideration of the regulator. What we did make clear is that QARD has an ongoing investigation in relation to the current matters, which they are working with VicPol on, and we did want to make sure that the current QARD investigation is not impeded. But I fully expect – particularly in line with the term that I read out at the start of my substantive answer, in that identifying options to improve interactions between regulatory schemes, including information sharing between regulators and agencies, both within Victoria and across jurisdictions, as well as the fact that the terms of reference are very clear, are things that are to be included but are not limited to, if you go to the terms of reference – that the review will look at our system of regulation and have the authority to make recommendations around our system of regulation. That rapid review will report on 15 August. As we have said, we will adopt every recommendation coming out of that rapid review, and that includes those pertaining to systems of regulation themselves.

#### Early childhood education and care

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:59): (968) My question is for the Attorney-General, represented in this place by the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. In February I asked the Premier to call for a nationally harmonised working with children check that includes mandatory child abuse prevention education. I am yet to receive a response. Five months have now passed, and in that time a childcare worker in Melbourne's south-west was charged with more than 70 offences against children in his care, including producing child abuse material. Horrifically, this person held a valid working with children check. Evidently this system is broken. The best time it could have been fixed was before the abuse happened. The second-best time is now. So my question is: what is the Attorney-General doing to call for a national reform approach to the working with children check system?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (14:00): I thank Ms Payne for her question and advocacy on this issue. I will make sure that in line with the standing orders that is referred to the Attorney-General in the other place for an appropriate response.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:00): I thank Minister Erdogan for passing that one on. By way of supplementary, in terms of what can be considered during an assessment, Victoria has the most limited working with children checks in the country. I understand there are plans to change this, with the first step taking place in August. Can the Attorney-General advise what other steps are being taken to improve Victoria's working with children check system?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (14:01): I thank Ms Payne for that supplementary question, and I will make sure that is passed on to the Attorney-General in the other place for a written response.

### Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (14:01): I rise today to update the house on Australia's largest infrastructure and housing project, the Suburban Rail Loop. As Australia's fastest growing city, Melbourne needs world-class public transport that will take thousands of cars off our roads and connect housing to jobs, services, education and health precincts. That is why on this side of the house we have got a plan to build for Victoria's future by creating better homes, better connected communities and better transport.

Last month it was a delight to join the Premier and caucus colleagues to announce how the Suburban Rail Loop will slash travel times around Melbourne, transforming the way that people move, live and work across our great state and taking pressure off our outer-suburban growth areas at the same time. Whether it is Frankston, Footscray or Fawkner, the Suburban Rail Loop means faster and easier journeys, creating more time to do the things that you love and less time spent in traffic. Students from Laverton will be able to get to Deakin University in 60 minutes using SRL compared to 79 minutes in the car. Glen Waverley residents will take just 22 minutes to visit friends and family in Caulfield, saving 17 minutes. On this side of the house we know Victoria is facing inevitable growth, and we must continue working to ensure we grow in the best possible way. We want Victorians like Sonny Ray Koch, born just yesterday, to be able to move more easily around the state, to get from school to work to university.

We also know that those opposite have no position on and no answers for these big challenges facing our state. They are happy to kick the tyres on a problem and come up with absolutely no solutions. Rather, the Leader of the Opposition sent Victorians a clear message when he said he will pause the Suburban Rail Loop. He said 'You're fired' to the 4000 Victorian workers who will be earning a pay cheque as a direct result of this project. He said 'You're on your own' to thousands of young Victorians looking to buy their first home, and he said very clearly that Victorians deserve to be stuck in traffic without access to world-class public transport infrastructure. While they spend every single day tearing each other apart over their position on this project, we are not wasting a day and getting on with the work that will transform our city for generations to come.

### Early childhood education and care

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:03): (969) My question is also to the Minister for Children. Minister, you recently stated that the Victorian childcare regulator, the quality assessment and regulation division, is effectively doing its job. Given a man that has been charged with 73 child abuse offences was able to work in almost 25 childcare centres over multiple years, do the minister and government stand by their position that QARD is doing its job effectively?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:03): I thank Mr Davis for his question. As I said in my ministers statement, I will not jeopardise the current investigation by going –

*Members interjecting.*

**Gayle Tierney**: On a point of order – I think you know what my point of order is going to be, President – I cannot hear the minister. She is sitting right next to me. There is just continual loud screaming and yelling from the opposite side.

**The PRESIDENT**: Mr Davis, if you could keep your interjections a bit – actually stopping them would be good. But you being the person that asked the question, it would be good for the minister to get a chance to answer it without interjection.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: As I was attempting to say, I will not comment on the individual circumstances in relation to the accused because I do not think any of us in this place want to jeopardise the process of justice being applied in these circumstances – in any circumstances – given the



abhorrence of what we are talking about. But in relation to the performance of the regulator, I am more than happy to report to the house – and I have made these positions clear in recent times – that at the end of 2024, 97 per cent of Victorian services had been visited by the regulatory authority within the past two years. We lead the nation in delivering high-quality early childhood education and care, with 96 per cent of services meeting or exceeding the national quality standard, well above the national average of 91 per cent. And certainly 98 per cent of national quality framework approved services were visited in the last two calendar years. I can keep talking. When it comes to staffing, the latest data shows that the proportion of services with a staffing waiver in Victoria across early childhood services was 1.2 per cent – this compares to the national average of 7.9 per cent – and for long daycare services specifically, 1 per cent of those services in Victoria were staffing waivers, compared to 13 per cent nationally. So when it comes to the regulator in Victoria, the statistics show that the regulator is exceeding its targets. But as we have said, if there is more to do, we will do it. We have commissioned a rapid review. We have indicated that we will accept every recommendation coming out of that review, and that is exactly what we will do post 15 August.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): I regard that as an offensive answer of blather that ignores the fact that the minister herself had said the regulator is doing a good job when it is clearly not. I therefore ask: given the horrific circumstances that have occurred in Victorian childcare centres, why has the government chosen to exclude the Victorian childcare regulator from its review? Is this to avoid scrutiny?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:07): Ms Gray-Barberio has already asked a question of a similar nature, and I indicated that it is a disingenuous misrepresentation. The rapid review can and will look at the system of regulation. We did not intend to impede the current investigations of QARD working with Victoria Police in relation to the situation of the accused, which I will not go into. But it absolutely remains open to the rapid review to look at the system of regulation, and I expect that they will do so. The other thing that Mr Davis might be interested in is that since 2015 QARD prohibition notices have increased annually by 500 per cent under our government. How many prohibition notices did those opposite issue – one.

**David Davis:** I move that the minister's shameful answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**The PRESIDENT:** I cannot put that question in the form it was put.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:08): I move:

That the minister's answer be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Community safety**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:08): (970) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, on Sunday a shocking demonstration moved across the city to the NGV while shouting what can only be regarded as racist chants designed to vilify members of the Victorian Jewish community, including donors to the national gallery. Minister, in your role as Minister for Multicultural Affairs you have been unprepared to condemn these racist chants that explicitly targeted prominent Jewish community members. I therefore ask: Minister, are you an antisemite or a tepid apologist?

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, if Mr Davis wants to make an accusation about a member in this place, then he should do so by substantive motion. I also point out that Mr Davis is yet again aggressively pointing in this chamber and raising his voice in an aggressive manner, and I would ask that that behaviour stop.

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order. I did not witness Mr Davis pointing, but I would remind people it is unparliamentary to point across the chamber. Mr Davis, I am not going to put that question. You will have to rephrase it for the question to be put.

**David DAVIS:** I ask the minister therefore: are you a tepid apologist who refuses to speak plainly about what is a direct threat to harmony in our multicultural community?

**The PRESIDENT:** It is another imputation. Making an accusation of that type about a sitting member needs to be done in a substantive motion. I do not know if you get a third go. We will move on. Minister Stitt has got a ministers statement.

#### **Ministers statements: mental health and wellbeing locals**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:11): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's continued rollout of mental health and wellbeing locals. A few weeks ago I had the privilege to visit the Brimbank local, which was one of the first locals to be established in Victoria, to announce the locations of the next seven locals. And yesterday I had the pleasure of visiting the Whittlesea local with the member for Mill Park, Minister D'Ambrosio in the other place, to announce the second round of roles through the locals graduate and early career program, supporting a strong pipeline of new workers to deliver these important new services. The new locals will be in the local government areas of Cardinia, Darebin, Maribyrnong, Maroondah, Mount Alexander, Port Phillip and Wyndham.

The Allan Labor government is proud to have already delivered 15 locals across 17 locations, which have supported more than 23,000 Victorians. The new locations will bring the total number of locals to 22 across 24 locations, meaning more people will be able to get the help they need, where they need it and when they need it, without the need for a referral or a Medicare card. Locals are the front door to the mental health system, supporting the missing middle: those who need more than that which a GP could deliver but do not meet the high threshold for more complex care. They deliver tailored treatment, care and support, including to those with co-occurring alcohol and drug challenges. These new locals will gradually begin operating from later this year, and once up and running they will provide a full range of clinical and wellbeing supports delivered in person, via telehealth and through outreach. I am proud that the Allan Labor government is building a mental health system that is community based, person centred and guided by lived experience. The addition of these seven new mental health and wellbeing locals and over 100 new graduate workers is a key part of that work.

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:13): (971) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, it is well known that the government's SRL project is not fully funded. A one-third program contribution of \$2.2 billion from the Commonwealth is just a wedge of the \$11 billion hole in that funding, and the government's plan to fund a third of the cost through value capture is patently unrealistic. In this context, given the story in today's *Age*, 'Rail loop tax plan to help fill \$11.5 b funds hole', I ask the Treasurer: will you rule out any new or hypothecated tax on households in the SRL zone to assist filling the SRL black hole?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (14:14): I thank Mr Davis for his question. As is well known, we are very supportive of the SRL project, as are most Victorians, who continue to vote for it and continue to be very excited about the prosperity that it is going to bring to the region in terms of housing and the ability to live near education, health and jobs. This project is a game changer for that region and for the state in relation to what I am particularly excited about, the productivity gains that it will bring to the state of Victoria. It is no secret that we have said that this is a project that will be funded through three streams: state, federal and value capture. To describe \$2.2 billion as paltry is something that –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Normal Victorians are not talking to me about \$2.2 billion as a very small amount. It is a show of faith in a project that is going to be so important to our state. In relation to value capture, we have been on the record that this is something that we think is an appropriate way to fund this project. It is not new. It was used for the Metro Tunnel. It was used for Sydney Harbour Bridge, I believe. This is something that we will continue to explore. We have had constructive conversations. Victorians understand that when you build productive infrastructure, what comes with that is greater prosperity for that region. It means that there are new shops, new businesses and opportunities for everyone to benefit from an economic uplift.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the question was very simply about whether there is a new or hypothecated tax on households.

**The PRESIDENT:** I believe the minister was responding to your preamble but getting to the answer to the question.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** SRL precincts will be highly attractive places for businesses and for commercial property, and prices will grow again and again in relation to that precinct, particularly as more and more of that project progresses. We have been very clear from the beginning that we will look to capture some of the value of this uplift. However, the final package is being finalised. Details will be announced once our implementation arrangements are complete.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:16): It is clear a new tax is going to come on households in those zones, so people better get ready for a new tax on their households in those zones. I ask a further question as a supplementary question to the Treasurer: will you rule out absolutely any additional tax on land within the SRL zones, including commercial land?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (14:16): Mr Davis, I have run through this. The minister for SRL has continued to run through this. We are working through value capture. There are a lot of ideas out there. Nothing in the paper was new today. When we have more to say, we will put that –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I am not going to engage in Mr Davis's speculation, fearmongering, the way he sees the world. I will act appropriately.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the Treasurer could just say, 'No, there will be no new tax.'

**The PRESIDENT:** It is not a point of order. Mr Davis, this question time you have asked questions and then started yelling at the minister when they are answering, and it makes it very difficult for me to hear the answer. Then you get up and point of order and say that the minister is not answering the way you would like her to, and I cannot hear her because you are yelling. It is weird.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I forgot where I was up to because I got distracted by all of the bluster over there. I am acting appropriately, consulting with the relevant minister and having appropriate conversations in relation to value capture. We have not made a secret of that. I will not respond in the way Mr Davis is trying to encourage me to, because I have got proper processes, probity and an appropriate way that I will conduct myself. I will not be baited on the hysteria that we have seen today from that side of the chamber.

### Freedom of information

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:18): (972) My question is for the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council. Two weeks ago in response to questions from a journalist about whether the government follows parliamentary orders with respect to documents the Premier said, 'We meet all of them.' This was despite the fact that your government regularly fails to respond to documents requests in time, claims executive privilege over the vast majority of documents

requested, thereby effectively failing to release them, and has never complied with section 10.03 of the standing orders, which outlines the process that must be followed when claims of executive privilege are made. As the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, can you provide assurances that your government now plans to follow parliamentary orders, including the standing orders, with respect to the release of documents?

**The PRESIDENT:** I might just take some advice. The Leader of the Government is not an official role in the general orders. Can I just get one minute. I might get some advice. I think it probably would more be within the remit of the Attorney-General, but in saying that, I think in this instance I might let the minister answer as best she can.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (14:20): I do not have a problem with the question – just where it might sit. I think I am previously on the record – and this answer is probably a bit more suited to a motion than question time. We have a lot of documents motions in this chamber. It is the practice of the government to rarely, if at all, oppose them so that things can go through processes. The problem that we have is an expectation that a documents motion is then going to result in a free flowing of documents without a proper assessment. That is what we are grappling with. For instance, I was disappointed to see the Greens take the opportunity to say that Minister Blandthorn had not delivered the documents in relation to your request. Our initial assessment of that exact request is 1 million documents – 1 million documents from the department that is currently looking at how to improve child protection and early education. Imagine the amount of resources it would take to process a request of that nature.

There is personal information, there is commercial in confidence – there are a range of issues that we have to consider before we release documents. This chamber made a collective decision that we will have short-form documents motions, which are resulting in two document requests every single sitting week. Those are then going into processes that we are trying to respond to. But half of the time responding is actually having to filter through what is inappropriate to release.

I am open to a conversation for improvements, but there has to be an acknowledgement that when we want to facilitate documents going out, we have to be responsible, particularly in the context of private information or damaging information. It is not about us wanting to hold things for government's purposes. We receive frank and fearless advice from our departments about what can and cannot go. They sit there and we go, 'We've got to respond to this,' and they go, 'Well, it will take us weeks, sometimes years, to go through some of these processes.' So I would invite a conversation with interested members and representatives of parties in relation to the improvement of that, because I understand it is not working for anyone. But again, I think there are two document motions tomorrow, and they continue to go.

If you ask the public if they want the Victorian government public service to be tied up looking at documents, locked into rooms constantly at the expense of delivering services, I think people would expect a bit of a balance there. But when I can point to one request that went to Minister Blandthorn, it is our estimate that more than 1 million documents may require a review to identify and redact which are in scope of the actual request that you made. So there is a conversation about the scope, and it is something that we are certainly up to having conversations about.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:23): I appreciate that answer. I will point out that it certainly touched on some of the logistics challenges with responding within the timeframe, but when documents are produced we still see widespread claims of executive privilege over the vast majority of things that are requested by this Parliament. New South Wales has standing orders in regard to executive privilege claims that are identical to those in the Victorian Parliament. Governments there, both Labor and Liberal, routinely follow those orders with respect to documents requests. This includes appointing an independent arbiter in situations where there is a dispute about executive privilege claims. Why has this government never followed the Legislative Council standing orders with respect to documents requests when this is routinely done by New South Wales governments?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (14:24): I think just in terms of continuing my comments on the previous question, I have expressed that I am open to these conversations. No-one has actually come to me since I have had that invitation open in relation to suggestions. There is an opportunity for the Procedure Committee to use it. There are some processes in New South Wales. We have gone up and we have looked at those processes; we have had conversations with the Leader of the Government in the upper house in relation to some of those matters. But it goes back to, again, having to have a conversation that is broader than just process. You have also got to have a conversation about scope, because all that would do is shift a lot of the onerous work of departments to being duplicated by another body. So in terms of making sure that we have the right processes in place to facilitate any of those changes, again, I remain open to those conversations. I would say that I have said this, I reckon, six months ago, and I have not received any suggestions from anyone in the Parliament. The invitation remains open. It is a collective. This is a chamber decision, not a government decision.

### **Ministers statements: drought**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (14:25): We welcome the recent rainfall through Victoria, but we know the impacts of drought are still hitting hard across Victoria. That is why the Allan Labor government's Drought Response Taskforce is listening directly to farmers and regional communities across Victoria, ensuring their voices shape the support we are delivering through these tough times. The government has now invested over \$144 million in three targeted support packages to help farmers and communities across our state, including significant investments through the water portfolio.

Our water investments include: over \$30 million to extend the East Grampians rural pipeline to connect hundreds of landholders to reliable, secure water through a pipeline project that is already underway; \$1 million to directly employ farmers and farm workers through our catchment management authorities in Glenelg Hopkins and Corangamite to provide much needed cash flow in these hard times; \$3 million to boost Victoria's statewide emergency water supply point network, adding new standpipes in places like Colac for farmers to access water; \$2.5 million to facilitate community access to underused groundwater bores in the south west, with pilot sites already being explored by Southern Rural Water; plus \$3.5 million to develop a new sustainable water strategy for western Victoria, which has been the hardest hit by drought, to ensure that we are even better prepared for droughts over the next 50 years. The Allan Labor government is backing our agriculture industry, supporting our farming families and the jobs and communities that rely upon them.

### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (14:27): Minister Erdogan will get the answers for Ms Payne from the Attorney-General in line with the standing orders.

### ***Constituency questions***

#### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:27): (1671) My constituency question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. Recently 59 new paramedics joined Ambulance Victoria's ranks, and I would like to take the opportunity to wish them the very best of luck on their learning journeys and in their careers. These talented and dedicated workers will be a welcome addition to the healthcare and emergency response workforce. The Allan Labor government will continue to support the latest cohort of paramedics and healthcare workers across Victoria, a part of the \$2 billion investment in Victoria's ambulance services. This investment has been critical, with the high demand for emergency services continuing across the state. These investments and additions will be absolutely vital for the healthcare system. Can the Minister for Ambulance Services update me on how many of the nearly 60 new paramedics will be stationed inside my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region and will be serving my constituents?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:28): (1672) My question for the Minister for Planning concerns the absurd situation faced by my constituent Andrew Willox who needed to remove a tree to build a shed on his property. Following instruction from Colac Otway Shire Council, Mr Willox was forced to pay a staggering \$12,662.50 to remove this single tree – one tree, \$12,600. It cost \$1360 for permits, \$5945 for a biodiversity offset, \$1232 for the offset broker and \$2805 for consultants yet just \$880 for the actual arborist and \$440 for stump grinding. That is \$11,300 in bureaucracy for only \$1300 of real work. These rules trample property owners' rights and pile on red and green tape that enriches professionals while punishing landowners. Minister, when will you reform this system to bring back common sense, cut these outrageous costs and balance environmental protection with respect for property owners?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:30): (1673) My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, my constituent Rumana is a survivor of family violence and has been on the priority public housing list since 2019. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing recently advised her that her application is being downgraded to the general register because she declined a housing offer which was unsafe. The property offered was less than 5 kilometres from her ex-partner, the person she fled from due to violence. The safety risk was not assessed appropriately by DFFH in the offer. She is now at risk of losing her priority status in the middle of a housing crisis, with over 65,000 people on the waitlist. She is terrified this will leave her and her children without a safe and stable place to live. Minister, will you commit to urgently reviewing Rumana's case and ensuring that women fleeing family violence are not penalised for refusing unsafe housing?

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:31): (1674) My question is for Gabrielle Williams, the minister for transport in the other place, and it is in respect to the government's proposed ban on e-bikes on Victorian trains. The question is born from an approach from local constituents, including Michael Hassett, who is the secretary of the Metro East Bicycle User Group. They have voiced their concern not only to the minister but to me, and they have urged this government not to proceed with a ban on e-bikes. They have done that because, as stated in a quote from their letter:

It lacks credible data indicating the relative prevalence of low quality / susceptible battery types ...

if that is in fact the concern. They have also outlined that it:

Lacks recognition that the majority of e-bike owners and users are responsible and utilise good-quality batteries.

In addition, they cite that this is an ageist policy approach and would actually discriminate against people who are unable to use traditional bikes and therefore rely upon electric bikes. They are also concerned that it will force e-bike users onto the roads, which in many areas are unsafe for them. In addition, they also believe it will cause e-bike users to revert to driving a car, which is not good for our environment.

### Northern Victoria Region

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:32): (1675) My question is for the Minister for Health. I recently visited Castlemaine cemetery in my electorate to see several graves where humans have been buried alongside the remains of their beloved companion animals. To many, pets are family, and being laid to rest with an item like an urn is often written into our wills or requested of our families. But what most people do not know is that this act of a joint burial is actually illegal. It means funeral directors and cemetery managers, like my constituent Debra Tranter from Castlemaine, are left with the impossible decision of breaking the law or honouring somebody's final wishes. Since I first raised this loophole in Parliament last year, New South Wales has gone ahead and fixed it, but the Victorian

government has refused to act. Will the minister meet with my constituents facing this issue every day in the course of their work in cemeteries across northern Victoria?

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call the next constituency question, I am really happy to acknowledge in the gallery members from the Republic of Indonesia's House of Representatives. Thank you for being here. You are very welcome, and I am sure we will learn a lot from you from your visit.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:33): (1676) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. It has come to my attention that the Knox City Council in my electorate has been banning or severely limiting Scouts and Girl Guides from conducting sleepovers in their own buildings – their own halls. Overnight stays are an essential part of the scouting experience, and they have supervised leaders who have provided all forms of insurance and warranties to council. I am advised that Knox council's position is that these halls are considered class 9B places of assembly under the National Construction Code and that overnight accommodation is not allowed unless exorbitant surveyor fees – on each and every occasion costing up to \$1400 – are paid. This clearly was not the intention of the law, and it is severely curtailing decades – nearly a century – of scouting tradition in our areas. Could I ask the minister to please commit to reviewing the Building Act 1993, the construction code and any other relevant legislation so we can rectify this problem as soon as possible?

### Western Metropolitan Region

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (14:34): (1677) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. My constituent, a health worker, is deeply concerned that the vaccination centre at the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital will be forced to close its walk-in service next month after its funding was cut. Child immunisation rates are declining, and vaccine-preventable diseases in Brimbank such as chickenpox and whooping cough have risen sharply since 2023. Council-run services are struggling to meet demand and are not designed for clients that may require access to hospital services like sedation. To quote Brendan Crabb, director of the Burnet Institute, from a recent *Age* article:

Nothing should be off the table. The cost-effectiveness of it is extraordinary. If you don't prevent, you've got to spend money treating.

My constituent asks: will the minister restore funding so Western Health can continue this vital service?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:35): (1678) My question today is for the Minister for Education. Will the minister adopt the Liberal Party's six-point plan to reform Victoria's childcare system, including urgently fixing the working with children check loopholes? Parents in Victoria were extremely shocked to learn that a woman who pleaded guilty to infanticide and left the surviving twin daughter with lifelong brain damage was still cleared to work with children in Victoria. I ask the minister to take real action, not just do another review, and implement these science-backed reforms, which would keep our children safe.

**The PRESIDENT:** Dr Heath, you need to relate that to your region.

**Renee HEATH:** I forgot to mention children in the Eastern Victoria Region.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:36): (1679) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Labor's destruction of Albert Park continues. Constituents in my electorate were appalled to see established trees in the park chopped down under the government's latest sweetheart deal with the grand prix corporation, with upgrades to their garages and hospitality

zone. History repeats itself. Some of the trees that were felled were part of the replacement plantings from the initial takeover of the park by the grand prix, pushed by Kennett in the 1990s. Locals have opposed the park being converted to a racetrack since the beginning, and the Greens stand with them. Why does Labor destroy this precious green space and lock the community and sporting groups out year after year and is it now, we hear, looking to extend that lockout, all for a loss-making three-day corporate event? Minister, will you move the grand prix out of Albert Park to a permanent circuit and stop this takeover of the people's park?

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:37): (1680) My question is to the Minister for Police, and it relates to a disturbing rise of retail crime in my Eastern Victoria electorate. Small businesses serve and create prosperity in our communities. Frightened, appalled and feeling unsafe, an 85-year-old lady contacted my office after witnessing retail theft in her local shopping centre. I have heard from traders who are also frustrated and anxious, left with the mess after this retail crime. Dreadfully, retail theft has seen a 66 per cent increase in the past year across Latrobe, Wellington, Baw Baw, Bass Coast, Cardinia, East Gippsland and South Gippsland LGAs, and Mornington LGA is up 44 per cent. Operating with fewer sworn officers, our local police members are overworked and under-resourced. Minister, what urgent action will you adopt to stifle this retail theft and protect traders and our residents, who are bearing the cost of this government's failure to thwart and manage crime?

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

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:38): (1681) My question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it relates to the recent chemical leak from the North East Link Program. The chemicals that spilled from this disastrous toll road project turned our local waterway, the Banyule Creek, a distressing neon blue. The local community are rightly frustrated, to put it mildly, that this project has further damaged the local environment. They have already had to endure the dust, the loss of nature and the damage to wetlands and bushland, let alone the noise and the traffic and the disruption. Minister, the community need to know exactly what this chemical was and the impact it has had on the creek and surrounding area, and they need to be assured that this will not happen again. Will you publicly report this information so the people of my electorate can fully understand what the chemical was and what impact the spill has had on their local community and can have any trust that it will not happen again?

### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (14:39): (1682) My constituency question is for the Minister for Children. My question is: can the minister please update my constituents on the loophole that currently exists whereby accused sex offenders are able to continue working with children while awaiting prosecution for crimes against minors? We are all shocked and deeply saddened by the disturbing incidents of alleged sex offences against minors in childcare centres. Many reportedly occurred in my electorate of Western Metropolitan. It is horrific to learn that accused perpetrators are being allowed to return to work with children while under police investigation and despite it being flagged. This is a failure of the government. We must act now to ensure this does not happen again. When dealing with children, the system should have better communication between government agencies to suspend all accused perpetrators' working with children checks pending charges. I look forward to hearing from the minister because my constituents need to ensure that their children are safe.

### **Western Victoria Region**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (14:40): (1683) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it relates to concerns raised by a constituent of mine in the Bacchus Marsh area relating to the extremely poor condition of the Geelong-Bacchus Marsh Road. The section of road between Balliang and Bacchus Marsh is the worst, riddled with potholes, uneven surfaces and rough shoulders. My constituent wants to know when it will be fixed. My constituent also wrote to the



member for Eureka, and the only comment that was made back was that they will advocate for the road to be in the next budget, so clearly nothing is going to happen for the next 12 months at least. My question to the minister is simple: will you guarantee that the Geelong-Bacchus Marsh Road will be getting fixed as a matter of urgency before the next budget and before it is too late?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:41): (1684) My constituency question today relates to 18 Windsor Avenue, Mount Waverley, in my electorate and the proposal to build a large and impactful rooming house at that location. This has been overwhelming the local community. The community is very angry. I hosted a large rally there recently on a cold winter night. We had more than 65 people turn up at relatively short notice. But the minister is not acting to help the community. The local member Matt Fregon is in hiding on this issue. The truth is that the community were not properly consulted and there has been a failure of the planning process. What I am asking the minister to do is to review the planning requirements for these matters – for rooming houses in these kinds of locations – to ensure that there is proper notification to communities. It is completely unacceptable the way it is at the moment, with government riding roughshod over local communities, Matt Fregon in hiding and the council actually aiding and abetting this.

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): (1685) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Last week a job was advertised online on the employment platform Seek for a sales assistant in a vape shop in Bentleigh selling ‘a wide range of quality vape products for vaping enthusiasts’. Since 1 July 2024 the sale of vapes has been illegal in Victoria, apart from in pharmacies by prescription to assist people wanting to quit smoking, yet more than a year later this particular retailer in my electorate is clearly breaking the law by continuing to operate despite the ban. The question I ask therefore is: Minister, how is the Victorian government enforcing the ban on this illegal retail activity in our suburbs –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** or not, as Mr Davis said – which is promoting access to products that pose a serious health risk to the community?

### ***Petitions***

#### **Marine conservation**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 4 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that reducing the number of Marine Rangers in Victoria is contrary to the benefit of the environment. There cannot be open slather on the catching of marine life. There must be regulators to find people with endangered species and who are overfishing. Many sea areas, for example the Mediterranean Sea, have been fished out because of the lack of regulators.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to increase or keep the current number of Marine Rangers in Victoria.**

**Melina BATH:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **Kilmore schools**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 570 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that Kilmore needs a public high school. Mitchell Shire is forecasted to have a 300 per cent growth with Kilmore

being the largest town in Victoria without a public high school. Despite land allocated for a public high school, Kilmore is not listed on the Victorian School Building Authority webpage. Surrounding towns, Broadford and Wallan, are at capacity as Kilmore residents are divided between both allocation zones.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to immediately start building a public high school for Kilmore.**

**Gaelle BROAD:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Daniel Andrews**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 12,644 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the proposed plan to commission a statue of former Premier the Hon. Daniel Andrews. We respectfully urge the Government to cancel this proposal as it is inappropriate to erect statues of living politicians. Public monuments should be reserved for individuals whose legacies have been tested over time and are broadly regarded as unifying.

There remains unresolved allegations regarding Daniel Andrews' management and handling of human rights during the state's pandemic response, lockdowns, and use of enforcement powers. These issues should be fully resolved before any public honour is considered.

Further, a traffic incident, relating to the serious injury of a teenager in 2013, remains the subject of public concern. Questions persist regarding Daniel Andrews' actions, including delays in reporting the incident and concerns about a possible political cover-up, raising serious doubts about accountability in public office. Spending taxpayer money on a political monument, particularly for a figure whose legacy remains contested, is inappropriate during a time of economic hardship and community division. Doing so risks deepening distrust and undermining public confidence in government priorities.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to cancel any plans to commission or install a statue of former Premier the Hon. Daniel Andrews, particularly if any form of public funds or private funding is to be used, as commemorating a living and divisive political figure whose legacy remains subject to scrutiny breaks with long-standing convention.**

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

### **Halls Outdoor Education**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 116 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the Government's decision to cut around \$200,000 of funding to Halls Outdoor Education, a Gembrook based provider of unique outdoor leadership training that has operated for nearly 30 years.

Halls Outdoor Education is the only provider in Victoria of Certificate III Outdoor Leadership and ropes training for Victoria and NSW, delivering vital skills to industries like the Australian Defence Force. The funding cut will result in job losses including the cancellation of nearly 30 traineeships with 13 employers and cause significant harm to the regional community and the local economy.

This modest funding is equivalent to the cost of a single traffic controller and is dwarfed by the billions spent on projects like the Suburban Rail Link or the millions paid weekly to consultants. Its removal disproportionately impacts regional youth, businesses, and the outdoor education sector, which the Government has acknowledged needs 500 new trained workers annually to meet demand.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently reinstate funding to Halls Outdoor Education to safeguard its unique training services, regional jobs, and youth opportunities.**

### **Main–Conness streets, Chiltern**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 102 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council:

1. Increased safety concerns at the intersection of Main Street and Conness Street in Chiltern where motorists are failing to stop at the Stop signs in Main Street. Daily, residents are witnessing multiple near-misses.
2. The increased number of heavy vehicles using Main Street which are not stopping properly at the intersection and are causing increased damage to our residential Main Street.

The petitioners therefore request that Transport Victoria:

1. Make immediate basic safety improvements including repainting the faded white lines and providing more effective signage and flashing red lights or rumble strips to reduce the risk of a fatality.
2. Fix the road surface in Main Street, in particular the hump that cars are bottoming out on or dangerously swerving to avoid.
3. Drastically reduce heavy vehicle usage through our residential area on roads that are not made for such heavy vehicles.
4. Develop a long-term plan to improve the safety of the intersection and the residential area of Main Street which houses the Chiltern Preschool and Chiltern Childcare Centre.

**Wendy LOVELL:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Main–Conness streets, Chiltern**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 133 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council increased safety concerns at the intersection of Main Street and Conness Street in Chiltern, where motorists are failing to stop at the stop signs in Main Street. Daily, residents are witnessing multiple near misses. There is also an increased number of heavy vehicles using Main Street that are not stopping properly at the intersection and are causing increased damage to our residential Main Street.

The Government needs to make immediate basic safety improvements to the intersection including repainting the faded white lines, providing more effective signage, and provide flashing red lights or rumble strips to reduce the risk of a fatality.

The road surface in Main Street, in particular the hump that cars are bottoming out on or dangerously swerving to avoid, needs to be fixed and a long-term plan needs to be put in place to drastically reduce heavy vehicle usage in the area and improve the safety of the intersection and surrounding residential area, including the Chiltern Preschool and Chiltern Childcare Centre.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to initiate immediate safety improvements to the intersection of Main Street and Conness Street in Chiltern, conduct a traffic count at the intersection, check that heavy vehicle weight limits are not being exceeded and develop a long-term plan to improve safety at the intersection.**

**Wendy LOVELL:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Housing**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 402 signatures:

This Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the community's support to change the legislation in the Victorian Planning Scheme section 52.23 to allow for:

- \* A limit on the number of rooming houses a street, and any area, can have.

- \* That there be a minimum distance between existing rooming houses (e.g. one rooming house per 500m radius)
- \* Community consultation through council or private building surveyor when building a domestic scale rooming house.

**Wendy LOVELL:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

##### *Alert Digest No. 9*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:49): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 9 of 2025, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Papers*

#### **Papers**

#### **Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Developing Fishermans Bend, June 2025 (*released on 26 June 2025 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 – Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025.

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order of 13 June 2025 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Alexandra Gardens Reserve.

Ombudsman – Annual Plan, 2025–26 (*released on 25 June 2025 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Alpine Planning Scheme – Amendment C70.

Bayside, Kingston, Monash and Whitehorse Planning Schemes – Amendment GC244.

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendments C386 and C388.

Boroondara, Frankston, Hume, Maroondah, Moonee Valley, Stonnington and Whittlesea Planning Schemes – Amendment GC265.

Casey Planning Scheme – Amendment C284.

Casey, Darebin, Frankston, Greater Dandenong, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Moonee Valley and Stonnington Planning Schemes – Amendment GC238.

Corangamite Planning Scheme – Amendment C65.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme – Amendment C251.

Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston and Monash Planning Schemes – Amendment GC226.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendments C387 and C468.

Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme – Amendment C117.

Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme – Amendment C137.

Kingston Planning Scheme – Amendment C229.

Knox Planning Scheme – Amendment C184.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C154.

Maroondah Planning Scheme – Amendment C148.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendments C403, C405 and C478.

Melton Planning Scheme – Amendments C231 and C243.

Monash Planning Scheme – Amendment C179.

Moorabool Planning Scheme – Amendment C112.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme – Amendments C304, C309 and C310.

Swan Hill Planning Scheme – Amendment C79.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendments VC258, VC275 and VC286.

Warrnambool Planning Scheme – Amendment C219.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme – Amendment C269.

Yarra Planning Scheme – Amendment C332.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C223.

Professional Standards Act 2003 – The CPA Australia Professional Standards Scheme, under section 14 of the Act (*Gazette S315, 19 June 2025*).

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 – No. 69.

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 – No. 62.

Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 – No. 68.

Court Security Act 1980 – No. 61.

Crime Statistics Act 2014 – No. 65.

Emergency Management Act 2013 – No. 50.

First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 – No. 58.

Gene Technology Act 2001 – No. 51.

Major Crime (Investigative Powers) Act 2004 – No. 49.

Marine and Coastal Act 2018 – No. 70.

National Parks Act 1975 – No. 64.

Port Management Act 1995 – No. 54.

Private Security Act 2004 – No. 53.

Rail Safety National Law Application Act 2013 – No. 66.

Residential Tenancies Act 1997 – No. 63.

Road Safety Act 1986 – No. 67.

Safe Drinking Water Act 2003 – No. 60.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Nos. 56 and 57.

Tobacco Act 1987 – No. 52.

Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014 – No. 55.

Water Act 1989 – No. 59.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to – Statutory Rule Nos. 48, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67 and 68.

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

Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025 under the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987.

Ministerial Direction on the Preparation and Content of Green Wedge Management Plans under section 46AEA of the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

Order making declaration under section 12B(1) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986.

Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 – Inspection Reports by Integrity Oversight Victoria of Victoria Police records, under section 37D of the Act –

September 2023 to April 2024.

May 2024 to October 2024.

Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019 – Members of Parliament (Victoria) Annual Adjustment Determination 2025: Statement of Reasons, effective 1 July 2025, under section 26 of the Act.

Yoorrook Justice Commission – Reports under section 37 of the Inquiries Act 2014 –

Third Interim Report – Yoorrook for Transformation (*released on 1 July 2025 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Final Report – Yoorrook: Truth Be Told (*released on 1 July 2025 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Proclamation of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates for the following acts:

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 – Parts 1 and 2, section 42 and Parts 7 and 8 – 1 July 2025 (*Gazette S322, 24 June 2025*).

Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Act 2025 – Parts 1 and 13 – 23 June 2025 (*Gazette S308, 17 June 2025*).

Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2025 – Whole Act – 25 June 2025 (*Gazette S322, 24 June 2025*).

Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Act 2024 – Remaining provisions – 1 July 2025 (*Gazette S308, 17 June 2025*).

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Act 2025 – Parts 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 14 – 1 July 2025 (*Gazette S322, 24 June 2025*).

### *Petitions*

### **Responses**

**The Clerk:** I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Agriculture’s response to the petition titled ‘Mandatory desexing of dogs used for breeding purposes’, Minister for Corrections’s response to the petition titled ‘Restrict emergency management days for violent and high-risk prisoners’, Minister for Emergency Service’s response to the petition titled ‘Water service for Bellbrae CFA station’, Minister for Environment’s response to the petition titled ‘Stop creation of Wombat-Lerderderg and Mount Buangor national parks’, Minister for Health’s responses to the petitions titled ‘Halt gender affirmation practices’ and ‘Review the current vaccine mandates imposed on workers’ and Minister for Water’s response to a petition titled ‘Public access to Beaconsfield Reservoir’.

### *Production of documents*

### **Great Outdoors Taskforce**

**The Clerk:** I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 25 July 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 28 May 2025 on the motion of Ms Purcell related to the Great Outdoors Taskforce. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

### **Planning policy**

**The Clerk:** I further table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 25 July 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 18 June 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to planning scheme amendments. The letter states that the date for 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.

**Early childhood education and care**

**The Clerk:** I table a third letter from the Attorney-General dated 25 July 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council of 18 June 2025 on the motion of Ms Gray-Barberio related to early childhood education. The letter states that the date for 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.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, one of those letters from the Leader of the Government dealt with the matters around planning documents. Those requests were also requests that were tendered at the inquiry, the select committee into –

**The PRESIDENT:** It is not time for a debate.

**David Davis:** Well, no. President, the claim that this government has not had time to search for those is clearly not true, because the documents were requested much earlier.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think you are debating the response. The vehicle you clearly have if you want is to move a motion to take note of the minister's response at the next day of meeting. That will be on the notice paper.

**David Davis:** I will certainly avail myself of that point, President, but there is also a point of order where a statement has been made which is patently not true.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the vehicle is the substantive motion as well if you believe the letter is misleading the house.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:53): I move:

That the letters just tabled regarding document provision be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:54): I move:

That the letter from the Attorney-General in response to the production of documents motion related to early childhood education be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

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

**Notices of motion given.**

**General business**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:11): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 30 July 2025:

- (1) notice of motion given this day by David Davis referring matters to the Ombudsman relating to the quality assessment and regulation division's regulation of early childhood services;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by Anasina Gray-Barberio establishing a select committee on the early education and care sector in Victoria;
- (3) order of the day made this day to take into consideration a letter from the Attorney-General in response to a production of documents order on early childhood education; and
- (4) notice of motion 975 standing in Rachel Payne's name on workplace drug testing.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:12): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) almost 60,000 Palestinian people have been killed and mass starvation is having catastrophic impacts on the people of Gaza;
  - (b) around 147 countries, including France recently, have now recognised Palestinian statehood;
  - (c) the Australian Prime Minister has refused to acknowledge the nation state of Palestine, despite it being in his own party platform;
  - (d) recognition alone will not stop the invasion or end the occupation of Palestine; however, it would demonstrate that the Australian government is willing to go beyond words and take genuine action.
- (2) does not support the State of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza;
- (3) supports calls for sanctions and an immediate and permanent ceasefire; and
- (4) calls on the Victorian government to advocate to the federal government to urgently acknowledge Palestinian statehood as an important step towards justice.

**Leave refused.**

*Members statements***NAIDOC Week**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (15:13): In this recent NAIDOC Week I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of the new Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative building on the lands of the Peek Woorroong people. The cooperative is the primary provider of social, health and cultural services from birth to elderhood for Indigenous people in and around Warrnambool. The new facility is a fitting home overlooking the Hopkins River, a site of profound cultural importance to Eastern Maar people. This beautiful setting naturally aligns with the cooperative's holistic approach to health and social care. Given this year's theme, 'The next generation: strength, vision and legacy', it was fantastic to see so many young people at the event. Two emerging leaders, Harmony Smith and Alkira Couzens, took part in the official opening ceremony. I want to congratulate the board chair Dominique De Bono and CEO Danny Chatfield and express my thanks for the wonderful breakfast with community members.

**Homelessness**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (15:14): I recently met a lady with a baby. They were homeless at the time and living in a shed. We exchanged contact details and made inquiries through several local agencies. I gave her a call last week to see how she was going, and it was a relief to hear that she is now in a home with her baby, but like many people in similar circumstances it has been a hard road. She received a letter from the government indicating that demand for housing in the region was high and they were unable to advise when a place would be available. In her frustration, she shared her experience online and a local property agent, Katie Ross from Property Plus Real Estate in Kangaroo Flat, reached out to help her. Again the lady needed support and reached out to the state government for a bond loan, and her application was rejected. In her desperation to pay the bond to secure the rental, she sold her wedding ring and her car. Right now there are over 65,000 applicants on the Victorian housing register: people waiting for social housing who are sleeping in cars and sheds, on a friend's couch or on the street. To quote one local real estate agent, the usual answer is, 'There's no room at the inn.' The Property Plus team has helped many others just like this lady find a home. I would like to say thank you for going the extra mile to help those who need it and also to acknowledge local agencies, including MADCOW, Salvation Army and Sunshine Bendigo, for providing valuable support to people who need it.



### Middle East conflict

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (15:16): I, like countless others around the world, am beyond horrified by the incomprehensible violence being used in the genocide occurring in Gaza. Worst of all, it is being accepted and even actively aided by many countries. This is part of a disturbing increase in global militarism. In Australia federal Labor has committed an obscene \$386 billion to AUKUS and is enthusiastically supporting arms manufacturing, including in my home patch of Geelong. We are told it is for our safety, but the endgame is destruction of life and everything that supports it. At a time of growing instability fuelled by the climate crisis and growing wealth inequality, there is an urgent need to pursue peace through non-violence. This does not mean being passive. It means actively creating the conditions for peace: diplomacy, negotiation, global compacts and ending arms trade and nuclear proliferation, as well as ensuring all people live in safety with necessities like housing and food. Violence does not create, it only destroys. You cannot bomb your way to peace. Non-violent resistance and diplomacy are far more effective at building lasting political and social change, because they require something to be created: cooperation and trust. Non-violence is hard but is the only path to peace. If ever there was a time for all of us to commit to doing this work, it is now.

### Big V Gala Dinner

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:17): There is a lot to update this place on in my community of Southern Metro. On my first matter, I recently had the honour of representing the Minister for Community Sport, Minister Ros Spence, at the Victorian Amateur Football Association's Big V gala alongside over 500 attendees. It was a wonderful celebration of Victoria's large amateur football community and their fantastic achievements.

### Youth Parliament

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:17): I was also fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to preside over the official opening of the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament in 2025. The program is available for any Victorians between 16 and 25 to be involved, enabling a platform for their voices to be truly heard. Well done to my staff member Ruby for being one of the hardworking members of the taskforce and running the press gallery. Well done to everybody involved for their hard work.

### Boroondara citizenship ceremony

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:18): Finally, I had the pleasure of welcoming our newest Australian citizens at the City of Boroondara at their citizenship ceremony last week. These ceremonies are one of the great traditions of our modern nation, and attending such a joyous occasion is a true privilege of public life. I wish my new fellow Australians all the very best for their future.

### Early childhood education and care

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:18): In question time today we had a minister who failed to be responsible for the people of Victoria. In the government's own site, it says:

The Minister for Children oversees Victoria's early childhood education and care system ...

It goes on to say:

The minister is also responsible for driving improvements to Victoria's child protection and family services system ...

amongst other things. Now, in question time today I asked a series of questions which were not answered by the minister. Shamefully, the government and others did not agree with the questions.

**David Davis:** That's right – a shameful cover-up.

**Georgie CROZIER:** It was a cover-up, Mr Davis, because we have been asking about the working with children checks that apply to applicants who are banned from child-related work, including in early education. One question I asked is:

... as Minister for Children what did you do to follow up on this serious bungle that was first identified in 2022?

And:

... were any of those 69 applicants found to be working in early childhood centres?

Other questions I asked were around why the government failed to respond to the recommendation made by the Ombudsman in 2022 regarding the working with children checks, which impacts the early education system, and why was keeping children safe not a priority of government? Now, she refused to answer every single one of those questions. There was a protection racket in this house. I think it is shameful, and I expect her to answer questions when she is next asked them.

### Drought

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (15:20): Well, what a delightful winter break we have had. Up in the north of the state we have seen decent snowfalls in the east and bleak skies bringing freezing cold and rain across the rest of the northern Victoria region. Although this beautiful winter weather has greened up the ground, it is still sparse. If anyone with a keen eye for crop production takes a look, the ground cover is thin and stunted. Unfortunately, our Premier may need to adjust her focus and take a closer look at the paddocks surrounding Bendigo to realise that we are still in drought conditions, with minimal feed and crop production as we work our way towards spring. Her \$1000 food and grocery support payment to drought-affected farming households was only a third of what was unanimously agreed upon in this house as a reasonable assistance package to our farming families. I hope to see the rest follow soon to help those who feed this state.

### Friendship and Wellbeing Association Inc

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:21): Over the winter break it was my absolute pleasure to join the Friendship and Wellbeing Association Inc – the Shanghainese Fellowship – for their group birthday party and volunteers commendatory meeting. We gathered in a community space in Balwyn, and throughout the afternoon guests were treated to wonderful cultural and artistic performances, including song, dance, martial arts and calligraphy, as well as the presentation of very well-deserved volunteer appreciation certificates. It was an honour to be part of this special event, and I very much enjoyed taking part in the musical performances and especially the communal birthday celebration for association members, complete with a cake.

The Shanghainese Fellowship connects local residents through volunteering and friendship, with the aim of promoting multiculturalism and harmony. The friendship, collaboration, goodwill and kindness generated by the fellowship were incredibly clear to see in the way that members all worked together to make the event run smoothly, contributed their talents freely and joyfully, and made such efforts to make guests and local representatives feel welcome. The fellowship do beautiful work creating connections and friendships, and they clearly have a lot of fun along the way. Xièxiè. Thank you for making me so welcome on your special day.

### Community safety

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:22): I want to draw the chamber's attention to the disgraceful activities on Sunday, where we saw a group of about 1000 so-called pro-Palestinian protesters move to the art gallery to try and force action at the art gallery. They are unhappy, as it turns out, that the Gandels have sponsored the gallery, and that there has been a section of the gallery that has been renamed. The Gandel family are great philanthropists, great donors in Victoria and great Victorians in every way. The idea that a group of pro-Palestinian thugs would be allowed to close down the arts centre and attack, almost with impunity, people who are major donors and supporters of the gallery, is outrageous. I was shocked that a government minister – the Minister for Multicultural

Affairs, no less – was silent in her approach on this. She said there is a right to protest. But there is not, in my view, a right to be thuggish. There is not a right to close down the gallery. There is not a right to attack major contributors to Victorian society over a long period. I think it is outrageous. I think the Minister for Multicultural Affairs needs to be pulled into line by the Premier. I think we need clear signals. It is clear that there is an antisemitic push in this state that needs to be stood up to and stopped. New South Wales has done a lot better – *(Time expired)*

### Housing

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (15:24): In the last sitting week I asked Minister Shing why construction had not yet commenced on a housing project in Flora Hill that was originally announced as an athletes village for the Commonwealth Games. Following the state Labor government's chaotic cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, it was announced that 160 homes, including 56 social and affordable homes, would still be built. The games were cancelled in July 2023, and by 25 June, two years after the cancellation, there had still been no progress on the housing project. Labor sat on their hands while over 3000 families in Greater Bendigo languished on the social housing waiting list, waiting for a roof over their heads. After my question in Parliament, the Premier and housing minister issued a media release patting themselves on the back for starting early works. But what do these early works include? They include erecting a fence around the building site, removing some old broken footpaths and an admission that the construction of homes will not commence until 2027. In effect, the Premier and the minister issued a media release to say they were erecting a fence – how bizarre. The Premier and the minister even had the arrogance to call these early works a major milestone for the project. The government should be embarrassed to draw attention to how little it has done in Bendigo and how late this project is running. The Allan Labor government is showing no urgency at all in providing much-needed social housing while families languish on the waiting list in Bendigo.

### Skyline Education Foundation Australia

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:25): I wish to speak on Skyline Education Foundation Australia. Comments like 'He's a bit odd', 'You'll never make it' or 'Can't you just be like your peers' are words that sometimes are received by gifted students, some of whom also face generational poverty and family violence. Rather than cutting down tall poppies, Skyline Education Foundation Australia is helping these students beat the odds. I met with Skyline's exceptional CEO Samantha MacRae, whose foundation received 138 scholarship applications for 2026. Some students are even from my community. Skyline guides gifted young people through challenging settings with financial and moral support, enabling them to progress into tertiary education and big careers. Skyline's alumni are living proof of what is possible. Here is an example: a daughter who lost her father to lung cancer and was raised by her mother in public housing is now a university lecturer with a PhD. A young man who nearly dropped out of year 10 earned a 92.3 ATAR and became a full Janet Clarke Hall scholar. Having raised gifted children myself, I know how vital it is for them to build self-belief, because when we back our brightest, especially those doing it tough, we all benefit.

### Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:27): I rise to acknowledge the courage and common sense shown by mayors and councillors across Victoria who have stood up to the Allan Labor government's latest tax grab, the so-called emergency services levy. Over the weekend more than 30 local leaders from 22 councils met in Moonee Valley and voted unanimously to oppose this \$3 billion tax which they have been forcibly tasked with collecting on the government's behalf. These councillors are right to be angry. They have been deputised as the tax collectors for an unpopular policy that shifts the

burden of the state's budget repair on to home owners, businesses and those that are already strained under the government-created cost-of-living pressure. As one councillor put it:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Local governments want to stand with their residents, not impose an unfair tax to paper over Labor's cuts to services.

This is not just a budget issue, it is a question of fairness and respect for non-CBD communities. I commend the working group of rural, regional and metropolitan representatives, who were prepared to take the fight directly to the Premier. They speak for millions of Victorians who are being asked to pay more, receive less and increase the risk of death as fire services are cut back.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:28): I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:29): It is my pleasure to rise on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025 and resume the debate. This legislation puts in place a new regulatory regime for the operators of e-scooters and e-bikes across Victoria, it establishes a central point of contact in the Department of Transport and Planning for councils that want to check the bona fides of potential operators and it gives PSOs the powers to issue fines and infringement notices in certain circumstances.

The coalition will not be opposing this bill. That is not to say we do not have a few things to say about it, but we are not going to oppose it. There are some worthy elements, and it is a step somewhat in the right direction for this. I think we can all note that all of this should really be aimed at encouraging an industry so that we can encourage active transport. One underpins the other, and active transport is a great good to be encouraged. Earlier today we passed a condolence motion for the late Honourable Mr Brian Dixon, and notable amongst his many achievements was Life Be In It, which, amongst encouraging all kinds of activity, certainly encouraged riding and an active lifestyle. Life Be In It is one of his great, great legacies. Accordingly we have an opportunity to create some legacy of our own.

Certainly since the time of Life Be In It, across the state programs like Life Be In It have helped encourage active lifestyles and in turn active transport as a genuine public transport alternative that has multiple benefits when done well. First of all, of course it clearly gets cars off the road, and there is widespread research that shows it is very effective in getting cars off the road, reducing congestion and reducing pollution. It is very effective in reducing emissions for the same reasons. It has clear and obvious health benefits. Life Be In It was a world-leading campaign on the health benefits of active lifestyles, and obviously active transport has health benefits. It also increases the mobility of our community. For those who do not drive or those who rely on other means of transport, it means that they have a way of getting around that is more suited to their area, to their means or to their ability. It is not, of course, a panacea to all transport needs, so we should not fall into the trap of glorifying it beyond what it does in a complex society where families and others have complex needs. But the main point is that is we must provide choice. It is about choice of transport according to the situation. Our

role in this is actually to remove any friction between choices so that you can move seamlessly from each of those choices to another and that is not an obstacle to getting on a bike or getting into active transport or getting on public transport.

With all those benefits in play, the emergence of e-bikes and e-scooters and ridesharing is really welcome and quite transformational in terms of development because it adds these elements of convenience, it breaks down some cost impediments and it lowers the physical threshold for active transport to be viable. It is a very helpful fillip to push active transport towards a greater mass. There is more of it, and thereby, with greater participation, that generates a positive economic cycle – no pun intended.

*Members interjecting.*

**Richard WELCH:** Well, you did not even laugh at the joke. You could at least laugh at the pun – you are laughing on the inside. But if we have a positive cycle where we engender greater participation, greater participation justifies greater infrastructure, design, investment and accommodation in rules and settings, which in turn helps encourage greater participation. I think that points to an important point in this area – design, investment and accommodation in rules and settings – because this bill sensibly tries to introduce some much-needed rigour and structure to this emerging category of transport, and it is really quite an overdue measure.

I think most active transport users and advocates in the community, those who are thoughtful about these things, would recognise that improved professionalism and governance will help and that the initial efforts to introduce ridesharing and e-bikes in our communities have failed, as the Melbourne city example suggests it has. The reason it has failed is largely due to a lack of structure and forward thinking over this new technology. In that respect forward thinking about emergent transport technology is a bit of a familiar tale at any point in the last 10 years. We only very recently had a discussion in this chamber on an electric vehicle charging station strategy, a conversation that was at least 10 years too late and 10 years later than any other jurisdiction that is engaging with electric vehicles. I recall that debate being quite wearisome in some sense, in that we were discussing electric vehicle charging stations as if they were a novel concept and as if we were coming across them for the first time. The tendency of speakers on that bill was to talk up the amazing attributes of electric vehicles to justify having a charging station strategy. We went well into hyperbole about how it would save the planet if we had charging stations, when really it is just a bit of basic, sensible infrastructure that every country that has electrical vehicles has already been contemplating and working on for about 10 years.

There is another example as well, of course. When Uber came along, again, there was a bit of a fumble, it is fair to say. Unfortunately, it has been a case where there have been winners and losers, when it did not need to be, because there was not sufficient foresight into how it would be implemented and the frameworks and the rigour around that. We could also say it about things like AI. AI has been coming towards us, as I say, like a tidal wave on the horizon for years. Anyone with any foresight can see what a disrupter that is going to be. But yet here we are, lacking the frameworks and rigour around it to actually create the greatest benefit and minimise the harms.

You could also say the same thing applies to Myki. The planning and foresight with that was such that we chose, foolishly, to have a bespoke technology. We chose, foolishly, not to leverage technologies, methods and practices that already existed. We tried to reinvent the wheel on it – again, no pun intended – but now we have had a very, very messy implementation. A lot of money has been lost and wasted, and we are having to go back again and re-engineer a solution from a less-than-optimal situation. If we are talking about active transport and if we consider active transport as part of the transport mix, then very logically we should have been considering the fact that e-bikes and e-scooters should have been hireable with a Myki card. You get off the train with your Myki and you put your Myki card down and you pull your scooter out and off you go on the next leg of your journey.

Again, I will invoke the late Honourable Brian Dixon, because again, in transport and foresight he was the pioneer who championed the introduction of compulsory seatbelts in Victoria – and for that matter as a world first. I think it was in fact South Australia that made it also compulsory to have seatbelts in the back seat. I could be wrong, but that is my memory of it. Nevertheless, that is the power of foresight, in that it adapts to evolving needs and to new conditions and has the vision to think about what the future may bring. The Liberals and Nationals are probably doing more than anyone to be thinking about the very significant future needs that we will have to address in coming years. I think it is quite exciting actually. Big problems ultimately need big solutions, and I think we are grappling with them now.

Nevertheless, councils are actively engaged, participating and in some cases considering delaying what they are doing. Operators are wanting to put capital in, but like with any business, they need certainty and they need rules. You need to understand the costs, the taxes, the obligations and the division of responsibilities before you risk your capital, and you need to know you have got long-term tenure in the application of that capital. Planners, too, need certainty, because this will affect urban design. It will affect how and where charging stations are designed and placed, how collection centres are used, what infrastructure goes along it in terms of gathering up vehicles, charging vehicles and maintaining vehicles. The councils, as I said, need assurance that they are dealing with legitimate companies, that something that they implement in their jurisdiction will not be completely at odds with something introduced or implemented next door and that the citizens of their borough are not having to flip between technologies or suppliers – that we have some commonality. And the users in the market generally need to have confidence that the vendors are reliable and trustworthy, that there are no dodgy operators who will not keep to service standards or deploy substandard equipment – that they have bikes without a GPS, for example, or with poor quality batteries. In Western Australia there was a case of a supplier who deployed more bikes than they were authorised to because their strategy was to try and maximise their revenue by saturating areas with bikes and minimise their collection and retrieval costs by not having to gather them up because they were literally everywhere, and they were in breach of their agreements.

For the record, I confirm that I am a very big fan of e-bikes – I own one; my son rides to school on one – and I am a big fan of ridesharing concepts. As I said earlier, they add convenience and they allow more people of all demographics to take it up. Commuters can take it up. Inner-city trendies take it up. I have a vivid, vivid –

**A member** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** Like Dr Heath, like all my colleagues. I have a very vivid memory from when I was living in London, in Soho, of seeing a hipster just seamlessly working their way through the backstreets of London, very elegantly – you know, satchel, flicked-back hair – almost serenely. It was a work of art. It actually made scootering look hipster, which is hard to do. From that moment on, when I saw that in action, I thought, ‘Now, this is actually the future.’ I clocked it. And this was 2014, I would say. Of course, it enfranchises other people, people whose minds are willing but perhaps their knees are not willing, to get around on active transport. And I think that is a great thing, because I have seen in parks around me, as I am sure everyone has, a lot of older people now getting out in the sunshine, travelling a distance they would not be able to walk. They would usually rather take a car or a taxi, but they are now riding through the park to get to wherever they need to go. I think that is a great development only made possible by e-bikes, as it happens. There are also tourist opportunities. I was looking the other day, and in New Zealand there are rail trail tours involving elaborate e-bikes. It opens up whole new sectors of engagement and commercial opportunity.

I am enthusiastic about the range of bike trails that we have across Melbourne, and in my electorate I am advocating heavily for enhancements to trails in the Plenty River area in the gorge, through the Plenty trail. There is a great eastern trail that can potentially get cyclists all the way from the city to Ringwood on an uninterrupted pathway if we just link up a couple more parts of the chain. There is one blockage at Elgar Road in Box Hill in my electorate, where we are very keen to get a crossing that

would take people through to Surrey Park and onwards. I think there are numerous other bike path projects across the state, and they should be encouraged. Other countries do embrace bike lifestyles, if I can put it that way, but they do not just do it because they like biking. They do it because they accommodate it as well in their culture, in their habits, in their expectations – in the norms of how they share spaces between cars, pedestrians and cycles as well. We have got a little bit to learn in that area, and with good regulation and good process we can probably weed out the worst habits of all three of those so that there is a bit more acceptance and tolerance between the different kinds of road users.

It was disappointing, though, to see Melbourne council discontinue e-bike sharing. There were complaints about the dumping of bikes, there were complaints about the safety and the bad habits of users et cetera. But I think this should be understood as a failure of the management of the concept, not a failure of the concept itself. After all, the concept has worked extremely well elsewhere, whether it is in London or in Adelaide or in Argentina or in most of Europe. Riding an e-bike is much safer than riding a Vespa through Rome, for example. And we have some natural advantages in Melbourne that mean it lends itself to e-bike and shared bike concepts, because we are relatively flat as a city. But what we did not do in our implementation is remove some of the limitations on the program's potential that arise in practice when you consider human nature in these things.

The programs in Adelaide, Darwin and London – in those programs the scooters, for example, do not have to be returned to a specific docking station at the end of use. They can be left anywhere, but this does not result in dumping, so to speak, because they are fitted with GPS, the users take a photograph of the location where they have left them and the vendors or the operators have active trailers going around all day to gather them up in real time. So in London all bikes, no matter where they are, are gathered within the day, and the next morning they are all back at their stations charged up. There are no bikes left lying about anywhere. In fact, there are penalties if there are.

Apart from preventing the inconvenience of bikes piled up outside people's buildings or cluttering up footpaths and things of that nature – or worse, being thrown in the river – the really important aspect of that is that it creates predictability for the users. And that is essential to adoption, because if you do not know two days out of three whether there will be a bike at the place you are regularly commuting through or using, then you will never get in the habit of relying on it. So the predictability element is really essential. And if you do not have a policy and rigour around the offering of that that means there will always be a bike here, then no-one is going to adopt it at the rates we would like to see it adopted. So predictability is essential, and it must be woven into it.

There are also within the bill some additions in that rigour to PSO powers. PSOs are a terrific initiative from the Liberal Party and the coalition. No-one could imagine going back to the precoalition times without PSOs. They are a lasting benefit. And of course the additions to the PSO powers are to provide some safety provisions initially – safety around helmets, safety around speed and safety around dismounting sensibly. I think it is important that we have consistency in the regulations for all users of bikes, whether they are conventional or e-bikes or scooters, and diminish risks. I attend a market in Blackburn once a month. We set up that market along and overlapping a bike path. The cyclists are fantastic because they dismount, they walk their way through the market once a month and get back on. That rule has to be universal for scooter riders and for e-bike users as well. Consistency through the regulations for all users is a very sound and good thing, and PSOs would have a sensible role to play in maintaining that.

But there is one counterproductive element here. I am still seeking a little bit more clarity, but it is mooted that we will be banning e-bikes and e-scooters on public transport. It certainly came up in the minister's second-reading speech in the other place. I think the thinking around it is a little bit confused on a couple of levels. First of all, we were talking about PSOs being able to enforce rules around e-bikes on public transport; now we are saying we are not going to have them on public transport at all, so there has been some fluidity in the thinking around that. It seems to imply that the thinking is not settled in that regard, which implies that it has not been clearly thought through in the first place.

**Ryan Batchelor:** There was a fire on a train.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes, but that is actually the issue. Correct – there was a fire on a train, but if there is a genuine risk of fire from e-bikes and e-scooters, why would it be only public transport that they are banned on? Do we then ban them in apartment buildings, car parks? Do we ban them in workplaces where people bring their bikes through the doors? Do we ban people putting their e-scooters in cars? There is certainly a safety consideration to be made. My point is not that there is no safety consideration, but why would you single out public transport alone for that? Why wouldn't you give broader thought to this actually being an issue for EVs, scooters and bikes?

**Ryan Batchelor:** Because it is being done by Metro Trains. Metro Trains do not run buildings. They are doing a review.

**Richard WELCH:** Yes, but the government does pass legislation, doesn't it, over all of this –

**Ryan Batchelor:** So you want to ban all e-scooters now.

**Richard WELCH:** Well, that is what you are proposing, in a very selective manner, on public transport.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** I think it is a very sensible, reasonable consideration to say if you are going to ban it in that setting, then in the same breath you should be considering what the ramifications are in other settings. To simply single out one setting alone is a piecemeal way to look at an issue, and when you look at things in a piecemeal way, you miss the broader context.

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** Who is saying that?

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** No, I'm not.

**Lee Tarlamis** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** No. Please – try a little bit harder. I understand broad thinking is not your forte. I mean, this is this is the government that started a \$34 billion project without funding for it, so thinking ahead I know is something you need encouragement in. I am happy to reinforce it and give you some guidance in that area, because clearly if you are going to ban e-bikes on public transport, there are other settings in which it could also be a safety issue, so why consider it in isolation? It is exactly that kind of lack of rigour that means that e-bikes have not flourished in Victoria, because you do not think ahead. You never think ahead, so it is counterproductive.

That does actually lead me reasonably to what the bill does not address, where it could be improved and other considerations. It does go a small way to explaining why rideshares are not flourishing in Melbourne and in Victoria like they are in other jurisdictions. Here is my diagnosis of why they are not flourishing: I think the initial implementation was a little bit through rose-coloured glasses – that if we just put these bikes out we will be in some sort of active transport utopia and everyone will be riding off to have picnics in the park and everyone will look after the bikes properly. Unfortunately, as much as we would love humans to live that way, they do not.

We have seen problems with the poor regulation. That means service standards around where bikes get dumped and how they are maintained et cetera have been less than the community expected, which has been has led to resistance. We have had a bit of the law of the commons in that when something appears undervalued, then people consume it without care. There is perhaps an argument to say that even though we would encourage rideshare opportunities, there is a lot to be said for encouraging



people to own their own personal e-bikes and e-scooters, because when it comes to care and respect for their use and others, that may be better served in partnership – not one or the other but certainly both.

Another thing the bill does not really go quite far enough into, I think – well, it could do and probably will need to – is safety overall. It only goes very lightly into the emergent safety risks around helmets. We know there have been people injured. One gentleman was seriously injured by an e-bike that had been hacked. You can hack into the software to remove the speed-limiting elements in the software. These bikes can actually go a lot faster than they are programmed to do if you hack them. They can go up to speeds of 40 or more kilometres per hour. Being hit by a bike at 40 kilometres an hour on a footpath when you are not expecting it can have very, very tragic outcomes, and there was a gentleman who was severely injured by just such a situation. We also have a lot of people home engineering bikes by augmenting conventional bikes at home, and they have a number of other risks associated around them; the braking is not calibrated to the power of the engine, and there are all sorts of other risks around it. If we were being a little bit more holistic about this, we would be looking into those.

It does not really go into the other part of the active transport puzzle in that it is not just about bike lanes in the CBD, where everyone puts a lot of focus; it is about dedicated trails and connections. I would like to see dedicated commuter trails that actually do not have to be directly connected to train stations or other forms but that actually give people an opportunity to come through suburbs and have a more direct, efficient route to the city that does not have to ape the roads or the railways to do so, because that is actually often a very inefficient route for cyclists.

Another consideration is cross-municipality. The bill is helpful in that it gives councils some certainty about the implementation of the ability of operators to establish their businesses within municipalities. But of course users do not respect a line on a map. They are going to travel far and wide, in and out. What we do not want to have are inconsistent billing systems or card systems or hiring systems simply between municipalities. We should have commonality; we should have standardisation. What we would want is technological interoperability between those. In some senses, particularly in urban areas, a council jurisdiction is a – *(Time expired)*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:59): I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on this bill, which is a very important bill, indeed for many of the reasons that Mr Welch went through, in that we are seeing new active transport technologies being used and being embraced by many people, and it is very good to see that. Whether it is major rail transport projects, whether it is upgrades to bus services or whether it is facilitating active transport measures, such as through this bill, there are many, many ways in which we can be making that sustainable transport transformation, and active transport is one of the most sustainable forms of transport. Things such as e-scooters and e-bikes play a very big and emerging role in that. Indeed for people that do have perhaps an inability or a disability that prevents them from riding a conventional bike or using other means of active transport, these can be very exciting.

We have seen a lot of innovations and a lot of different ideas. We had at some point Segways possibly taking hold, but those never really took off. It was a bit of a flash in the pan. We have seen e-bikes, though, and e-scooters come into their own much, much more. Indeed Mr Welch gave his recount of London from about 10 years ago. Just a few years ago in a former job, as I have said many times in this place, I was proud to be a union organiser covering retail worksites across many different parts of Melbourne and at one time looking after central Melbourne. In that time it was much more efficient as well as sustainable for me to be going from site to site by tram or train or even bus in some cases. On the rare occasions where that was not feasible, I actually made use of hire bikes, and it was a great experience. It was probably less a suave, sophisticated hipster cycling through Soho than it was a bit of a bad Mr Bean impression with me trying to work out how to ride a bike, but it was a great way to get around Melbourne, and these sorts of schemes are very good for the opportunities that they provide.

I will actually start this by going directly to the point of that work across councils. We do currently have a system where different local councils themselves are responsible for the regulation and

management of these systems, and it will continue to be the case that they will have the choice of what sorts of systems they engage with or if they do not at all. However, one of the main features of this bill is that it is going to provide that centralised regulation process through the Department of Transport and Planning, requiring operators to be, amongst other things, a fit and proper person and those various other regulatory requirements too. I will touch on some of them shortly, but having those systems in place at DTP, rather than relying on each council to do that work, firstly, for both the cyclists themselves and the e-scooter users themselves, addresses that issue of inter-council transport. We have many councils across inner Melbourne, and it is not appropriate to expect people to be complying with those boundaries that are determined by long historical precedent. It is also beneficial to the councils because it means that they do not have to then go and reinvent the wheel effectively or develop those regulations themselves. We hear often when discussing the vertical fiscal imbalances in this country that councils are arguing for the state to take more financial control of things, and in this case we actually see what the state government is doing via the provisions that will be facilitated by this bill. We are actually seeing that regulation function taken up by DTP. As a result, councils will not have to then reinvent the wheel and do that work themselves. So it is very, very important that we are supporting local government with these provisions too.

Road safety is of course a very important part of this, and there will be another bill, I believe, today that goes into closer detail with some other road safety and indeed marine safety matters. But the standards that this bill introduces will require operators to implement various systems, technologies and safety measures, and these measures actually go directly to some of the points that Mr Welch was making in terms of, yes, some of the less ideal parts of human behaviour that can lead to some of these issues. Many of them will be able to be addressed by the provisions in these bills within those existing schemes, such as requiring the mandatory provision of helmets and verification of that; measures to ensure that a helmet is made available to a hirer of an e-scooter and verification that they are being worn; zone management, including capabilities to detect the location of sharing scheme vehicles; ability to slow or stop devices based on location; parking management, including measures to ensure that vehicles are parked appropriately at the end of a hire; footpath detection, including requirements for sharing scheme vehicles to be fitted with technology to detect footpaths and to take appropriate action, such as playing an audio warning or slowing or even stopping the vehicle when the vehicle is being detected as being ridden on a footpath; as well as measures such as detection of intoxicated riders, vehicle identification and other measures such as topple detection and the like too.

These are all very important things that this bill will enable regulation to apply to, to ensure that as this does continue to grow and become a more popular mode of transport it can be done in a way that keeps it safe for the users and for other road users, including vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, children, other cyclists or whatever the case may be. Indeed these do play an important role, and as Mr Welch touched upon, that last-mile operability of them and that integration with the transport network are very important.

Safety too is very important, and it is perfectly appropriate that a review is underway. There are certainly not many things that you want to see less if you are on a very crowded train carriage than a sudden and large fire taking place, especially if you are not at a station where you can get off. So it is perfectly proper and appropriate that that review is taking place at the moment so that we can get that balance right between support and encouragement of these new technologies and ensuring that we are not endangering public safety by doing so. This is a straightforward, sensible bill, and I do commend it to the house.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:06): Back in February 2021 I brought a constituency question to this place about someone who had contacted my office. He was an older gentleman, and many older guys often have trouble walking. But this man in particular did not want to get one of those mobility scooters that you sometimes see. He had an electric scooter, an e-scooter, with a seat on it, which he thought was better because he could take it on the train more easily; it was much better than one of those great big mobility scooters. He thought that was really cool, but he was

not allowed to use it. So I asked on his behalf about legalising these so that he could get around and use it on public transport. Then in 2021, in September, the government talked about the e-bike trials – this also included e-scooters – and for some reason probably only known to the government they only allowed rental companies to rent these out; they would not allow private ownership. Of course the scenario where literally everyone using these e-scooters was using them for the first time from a rental led to consequences which were entirely predictable and accidents left, right and centre. Then, back in 2023, the government finally allowed personal e-scooters to be used, which was wonderful – and I am sure that the older man who contacted my office in 2021 would be very happy about that – and now many, many people use e-scooters.

In fact one of my children recently bought an e-scooter, and he bought it for the purpose of getting to and from the train, as did many people. Now we are in a situation where the government is contemplating banning them from trains. Now, I note that it is just in a consultation phase, but I would urge anyone that happens to come across this speech to put in their view on this consultation and whether they think it is a good idea to ban these things from trains, because there are many people throughout the community that use them to access public transport because they live a bit far away from the train station and the buses might not be very convenient to get to the train station. So I would urge people to let the government know that they are not happy about the possibility of their e-scooter being unable to be taken on the train.

As for the bill itself, actually the Libertarian Party will not be opposing this bill. Most of the things in this bill are more sensible changes to the current regulations. They are not really taking away anything. My main concern is what has been foreshadowed through this government consultation process, the idea of banning e-scooters from public transport. It would cause problems for many Victorians, including older Victorians like the man who was a constituent of mine but also younger people who do not own a car. They find it a very convenient form of transport. I acknowledge that there are safety issues with batteries, but of all machines that use batteries, you would think that e-scooters are one of the least likely to be damaged because they are designed to be hard. Much more dangerous you would think would be laptops being dropped and things like this; they worry about that on planes quite often. For those reasons I will not be opposing this bill, but I would encourage everyone to take part in the consultation process that the government has put out and make their voices heard if they care about e-scooters.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:10): Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025, which is really a timely and important piece of legislation that deals with a rapidly growing part of our transport system, e-scooters. In just a few short years e-scooters have gone from being a novelty to being very much a familiar sight in cities across Victoria, especially here in Melbourne. Just a few years ago within my own electorate the City of Melbourne and the City of Yarra joined our state's e-scooter trial, and we have seen how popular these vehicles have become.

E-scooters do fill a gap. They offer a low-cost solution to first and last kilometre access and reduce congestion by giving people another alternative to private vehicle use. You see them near train stations, scattered across universities and parked on street corners, and for many people, especially young people, students and shift workers, e-scooters offer a convenient, affordable and sustainable way to get from A to B. For someone who does not own a car, an e-scooter can be the difference between making a job interview and missing it, between showing up for the late shift and getting a safe ride home. It is so true to say that these are small vehicles and they carry enormous potential when done right.

But with their rise in popularity has come a rise in concerns around safety, and this is what this bill before us seeks to address, because while e-scooters can offer real benefits, they can also pose some real threats. We have all seen people zipping around town on these scooters on footpaths, and we have seen them dumped in places where they block access or create tripping hazards. We have heard the stories about injuries both to riders and to pedestrians. For people with mobility issues, for older

residents or for those navigating this city with a cane, a pram or a wheelchair, these issues are not just annoying, they are exclusionary. They affect safety and accessibility in a very, very real way. So it is our job to ensure that this form of transport, while welcomed, is also safe, well managed and respectful of the shared nature of our public spaces.

This bill is about putting in place a smarter, safer and more enforceable regulatory framework for sharing vehicle schemes, with a focus on e-scooters. It builds on the lessons of the past three years of the state's e-scooter trial – one of the most comprehensive in the country, might I add – and it fulfils the Allan Labor government's commitment to strengthening regulation in this space. At the heart of this legislation is the preapproval process for vehicle sharing scheme operators, and this means that operators will now have to provide e-scooters for hire in Victoria and they will have to comply by applying to the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning and showing that they are a fit and proper person to operate a scheme. This is a significant improvement on the current scheme, which relies on local council agreements alone. Instead of municipalities reinventing the wheel, councils are going to be supported by a clearer statewide framework. It means greater consistency, clearer expectations and better outcomes for everyone involved. This bill also paves the way for enforceable minimum safety and technology standards to be prescribed in regulation for all sharing scheme operators.

These standards respond directly to the kinds of issues that members of the public and local government have raised throughout the trial. These include helmet use and verification, ensuring that helmets are not just provided but actually worn by the rider, and footpath detection technology so that devices can recognise when they are being ridden somewhere they should not be and respond accordingly, such as issuing audio warnings or slowing down automatically. Parking management is also an issue that has been raised, with systems to ensure that scooters are parked upright, securely and without blocking pedestrian access. There is zone management so that these devices can be slowed or stopped if ridden into sensitive areas or indeed outside of permitted zones, and there are measures to detect intoxicated or impaired riders such as cognitive response testing and other vehicle safety requirements such as speaker systems for alerts, topple detection and unique identifiers for every one of these vehicles.

These issues are not just hypothetical; they are significant, and I have heard about them in my community. Scooters have been left lying across footpaths. There have been near misses at intersections or riders doubling up without helmets. These kinds of behaviours erode public trust and undermine the credibility of the entire sharing scheme model. This bill sends a clear message that putting e-scooters on our streets will not come before proper oversight. Operators will need to demonstrate that they can meet safety standards before their devices hit the road. I am quite pleased to see this legislation before us and just say that this bill is not anti scooter, it is in fact pro safety, it is pro accountability, it is pro community and it is pro access. It recognises that these vehicles are here to stay but insists that they be managed properly. It reflects that technology is moving fast and government has a role to play in ensuring that community safety is not left behind. It puts people, especially pedestrians, children, older Victorians and people with disability, at the very centre of this conversation. Public space must remain public, it must remain safe and it must remain accessible to all.

I want to acknowledge that this legislation is only part of the answer; cultural change is just as important. With that in mind, can I take a moment to say to everyone out there who does indeed ride an e-scooter: please stay safe, please wear a helmet, follow the rules and be aware of those around you. E-scooters are a great way to get around, but they are not toys. Nobody deserves to be injured, and no-one deserves to lose their life just getting from one place to another. I have heard very loud and clear from medical professionals that there is more work to be done to address the safety concerns, and I am hoping this bill before us today does just that. I commend this bill to the house.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:16): I rise to speak on behalf of the Greens on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. This bill comes to us following several years of trial e-scooter share hire schemes in a handful of councils

around the inner city area of Melbourne, and I am pleased to see the government demonstrating through this legislation that they appreciate the role of e-scooters and other similar vehicles, which is important, in Victoria's transport landscape. The Greens and I agree with the government that shared e-scooters are on the whole a great thing. They can provide really important last-mile links between a train station or tram stop and someone's house or provide connections in directions that public transport is lacking – travelling east–west in parts of Melbourne, where the tram network runs north–south, for example.

We should not gloss over the fact that public transport is lacking in a lot of these places, and it is frankly ridiculous that our bus network does not provide good cross-town connections that link together our tramlines. Labor does urgently need to reform the bus network across Melbourne and indeed across the state to provide fast, frequent and direct routes. That need is not going to go away, and this bill to regulate e-scooters and other shared mobility will not solve it. In the meantime e-scooters perform an important role in our transport system, and in some situations and locations they probably always will. So it is important that they be properly regulated.

As with any popular new technology, there have been some teething problems relating to the widespread adoption of e-scooter share schemes, including safety and accessibility issues. To some extent throughout this e-scooters have been unfairly demonised in the media, presented as a scourge on our streets and endangering riders, pedestrians and car drivers. I think a lot of this is due to the novelty of e-scooters as a widespread mode of transport and is decreasing as more and more people adopt this technology. We are so accustomed to this car-dominant culture that all the deaths and injuries caused by cars, SUVs and truckzillas hardly register in the public consciousness anymore, and it seems to be a fact of life that the general public now simply accepts, which it should not.

Many of the issues with e-scooters do often arise from the fact that space in our cities has not been made for them. When most of the space dedicated to transport in our inner city roads is built for cars, it is up to scooter riders, cyclists and pedestrians to squabble over what is left. There is no doubt that scooters reaching up to 20 kilometres an hour should not be competing for space with people walking, and frankly truckzillas reaching 60 kilometres an hour or more should not be competing for space with people on bikes either. In some cases, on quieter residential streets, the solution can be slowing down and calming traffic, and I am pleased to see that Merri-bek council has recently been approved to trial 30-kilometre-an-hour areas in Brunswick and Coburg. In other cases on busier roads with more and faster car traffic we do need more separated lanes and paths to make cycling and scooting a safe and comfortable option for people of all ages and abilities. I am hopeful that as more people embrace these modes of transport, the more likely it is that the government will pursue both of these options, keeping people walking safe from people on bikes and scooters, who are in turn safe from cars – not to mention decreasing congestion and carbon emissions by encouraging people to leave those cars at home.

This bill introduces certain elements of a framework under which councils can enter into individual agreements with private e-scooter share hire companies. Overall, it is good that the Department of Transport and Planning will take some of the burden off councils by pre-approving the vehicle share hire operators that councils can choose from and by prescribing safety standards like footpath detection and helmet detection.

This bill is a good start in signalling to councils that e-scooter share hire schemes are here to stay and encouraging councils to participate by entering into their own agreements. But I do worry that in its current form the bill is a half-measure that ignores many of the problems we have seen since scooter trials began in a select number of councils. As it stands, the City of Melbourne has banned share hire scooters altogether, while Yarra has effectively done so by raising fees by 400 per cent. I understand the government's hope is that in introducing this bill, councils will have the confidence to enter into contracts with e-scooter and other micromobility companies. That is far from a guarantee.

Let us imagine a scenario where I need to get from my electorate office out in Brighton to Parliament House but a tree has fallen on the tracks and the Sandy line is out of action. Now, the trip by bike is

not actually much slower than that by train, but I have left my bike at home on this day. In this imagined scenario I am lucky that Bayside council has entered into a contract with an e-scooter company, so I can grab a nearby scooter and head off into Parliament. Unfortunately, though, in this hypothetical scenario my luck runs out when I get to Elwood, because hypothetically the City of Port Phillip has not entered into an agreement, and the scooter just grinds to a halt the moment I cross the border. I have actually had this happen to me when I was trying to get from Port Phillip through Stonnington. Perhaps in this scenario Port Phillip has entered into an agreement, but it is with a different scooter company. When I reach St Kilda Road a little later in my journey, I will have to roll the dice again as I enter the City of Melbourne. In fact, I would like to ride on the protected bike lanes on St Kilda Road, but the road itself is a boundary between local government areas. Will I find myself able to scoot along northbound lanes in one city but not southbound lanes in another?

This sort of scenario brings to mind colonial governments who built railway networks of different gauges before federation. For 81 years the cry would ring out – ‘Albury, all change’ – and grumpy passengers would need to swap from a broad-gauge Victorian train to a standard-gauge New South Wales train, sometimes in the middle of the night. Thankfully, this line was fully standardised in the 1960s, but to this day Albury station’s massively long platform stands as a testament to that folly. Will racks of scooters from competing firms, lined up on the borders of Melbourne’s local government areas, become the modern-day equivalent?

The Greens have raised the problem of council-by-council scooter patchworks with the government, and the government have told us that it is being done this way because scooters are mostly used on council-controlled roads. But so are buses mostly operational on council-controlled roads, and the last time I took a bus I did not have to hop off at the council boundary. But the government does seem determined to leave this matter up to councils for now. It is true that councils absolutely should be involved in running these share hire schemes, and fortunately there is plenty that the state government could do to help councils out and make it feasible for them to run these schemes in a responsible and user-friendly way.

In addition to protected bike lanes for bikes and scooters to keep them separate from cars, and working with councils to implement lower speed zones, I urge the government to support councils in providing dedicated parking for scooters. One of the biggest complaints we hear about e-scooters is the tendency for inconsiderate riders to leave them blocking footpaths. Yarra City Council has had a disability discrimination case lodged against it because scooters were blocking wheelchair users from freely moving along the footpaths. If it were clear that scooters needed to be parked in ways that do not block footpaths at all and if the state provided support for councils to set aside scooter and bike parking bays, much of this problem would be alleviated.

The transport advocacy organisation Streets Alive Yarra points out that in cities like Washington, DC, it is common for local governments to set aside a single kerbside parking space, which can hold a number of parked scooters and bikes, keeping them off footpaths altogether. The proposed regulations like helmet detection, footpath detection and parking management sound like good ways to increase the safety of riders and the public in conjunction with proper infrastructure like dedicated parking bays and separate protected lanes, which I would like to see the government commit to. But even then we cannot just leave it to private companies to self-regulate. I note that the bill includes penalties for companies not adhering to the standards that will be set by these regulations, and enforcement will be key. Otherwise enforcement will be limited to infringements that can now be issued by protective services officers, per this bill, to individual riders, who may be set up to fail in the absence of adequate infrastructure like a place to ride or to park safely.

Overall, the Greens and I welcome this legislation, and we will be supporting it. We see e-scooters and micromobility vehicles as an important part of Victoria’s transport network, and we welcome these steps to making them safer for riders and the public. We encourage the government to go further than this by improving safe infrastructure like separated bike and scooter lanes, supporting councils to put parking bays on the street rather than on the footpath and ultimately working on developing a less

fragmented governance model. In the meantime I hope that users will not have to change scooters every time they reach a council boundary.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:26): I rise to make a contribution on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. I would like to first thank my colleague in the other place Minister Williams, who has served as the Minister for Public and Active Transport for the past two years and worked hard to overhaul our regulatory framework over the years, particularly as vehicle sharing has become more common. Vehicle-sharing services are a central consideration to this legislation, which ensures that there is more oversight and approval for rideshare services in Victoria and helps to protect passengers along the way.

E-scooters being made available via sharing schemes are a useful and popular mode of transport for people wanting to travel short distances. They have proven to be popular in Victoria, with Melburnians in particular taking up the devices in high numbers. Not only do they help ease congestion, they are an affordable mode of transport and provide first- and last-mile access to public transport. As such it is vital to ensure the safety of e-scooter riders, pedestrians and other road users.

The Victorian government undertook a trial of the use of e-scooters throughout Victoria in 2021–22. E-scooter riders using these devices as part of the trial were required to follow road rules, which included the requirement of wearing helmets, restrictions on speed and requirements on where e-scooters were able to be lawfully ridden. The trial concluded in October 2024, permanently allowing sharing schemes to provide private e-scooters to operate across Victoria. The government also announced that new legislation would be introduced in 2025, setting out new requirements for e-scooter share hire operators to apply to councils to operate them in their municipalities, with minimum standards to be enforced through a preapproval scheme. The bill upholds that commitment. The trial program showed us that e-scooters provide the community with a low-cost and emission-reducing form of alternative transport. Many Victorians have used them successfully to make millions of trips over the past three years.

But while e-scooters have become a stable form of transport, both for personal use and for delivery through rideshare services, they are still new devices to many in the community. As it stands, the regulatory framework in this place for transportation in Victoria is not up to scratch with community expectations and standards when it comes to e-scooters. We need to ensure there is proper oversight and regulation of e-scooters in the community, and that is why this bill seeks to improve compliance and safety for all. Ultimately the bill makes important changes to deliver on the government's commitment to providing greater certainty to councils and sharing scheme operators, all of which will make e-scooter use much safer and enable the better management of parking and amenity issues.

Safety on our roads is imperative and something I am very passionate about, as I served the Transport Workers' Union as its national president prior to coming to this place and serving in this chamber. There are many rideshare workers who use e-scooters and similar vehicles to deliver to customers, particularly in western portions of my constituency in Southern Metro closer to the CBD, where e-scooters were commonplace until the ban enacted by the City of Melbourne. Safety is of great importance to me and the Allan Labor government, and that is why we are pushing ahead with this legislation to establish a clear regulatory framework for e-scooters and related matters. This bill inserts a definition for what constitutes an electric scooter offence into the Road Safety Act 1986. As it currently stands, there is no set definition pertaining to the amenity of electric scooters in transport legislation in Victoria, and as such you can often find them lying around in the city, usually for the use of e-scooter hiring services. Some local government areas, like the City of Melbourne, eventually moved to ban electric scooters altogether from the roads and sidewalks. This amendment now inserts further provisions into the principal act to make it so that electric scooters are regulated and users can be held accountable for their actions.

It is simple, common sense that people that use electric scooters should be held accountable for any incidents and disruptions caused by their behaviour. For example, one way this is enabled is by the

empowerment of the protective services officers, otherwise known as PSOs, to prosecute an electric vehicle offence. This means PSOs can help uphold public safety when electric scooter users get out of control and break the law. That is not to say that all electric scooter users are breaking the law, but we need to ensure we have proper mechanisms in place to deal with the few that are doing the wrong thing, and that is what this amendment will do here. It will empower PSOs to continue upholding public safety and order on this new mode of transport and will make sure users of electric scooters are held accountable for their actions, where the existing legislation does not provide for any repercussions. The existing legislation provisions relating to the regulation of vehicle sharing scheme operators set out in the Road Safety Act 1986 will be repealed and re-enacted in the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 to form a comprehensive approach to regulating vehicle sharing operations.

Overall the bill represents the government's continued commitment to improving transport options, accessibility and amenity for the community. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:32): Very briefly from me today on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards Bill) 2025, an important piece of legislation that will improve the regulation of e-scooters here in Victoria: the Allan Labor government has an absolute commitment to making sure that our public transport system is improved. We have got the Metro Tunnel coming on line. We have got our massive improvements across the metropolitan rail network through things like the level crossing program. One level crossing removal at Glen Huntly is two years old this week. It is a fantastic addition to the local community in and around Glen Huntly and Neerim roads in Caulfield East.

Alongside improvements we are making to our public transport network, we are making improvements in safety standards to our active transport network, and through this piece of legislation, improving the safety standards that apply to electric forms of active transport, such as e-scooters and e-bikes. We are making sure that the systems that are in place, the regulations that are in place and the safety standards that are in place for this incredibly important part of the active transport network here in Victoria and particularly here in metropolitan Melbourne meet the needs of the community and meet the safety needs of those who are not users but who are participants, pedestrians and the like in our communities but also make it easier and safer for those who do want to use this new method of active transport, to make sure that they have got the transport that meets their needs as commuters, whether that be to and from work or whether that be recreationally in our community.

There are a range of measures in this bill, which my colleagues have covered off. I just very briefly wanted to lend my voice and lend my support to this legislation – to the safety standards that go with it and the improvements in the management, operation and regulation of the use particularly of e-scooters and e-bike – and to support those methods and those means of active transport in our community. I commend the bill to the house.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (16:34): Today we have had some pretty wideranging contributions, in particular about the utility and about the sophistication of e-scooter technology around Melbourne and also overseas. It has been a really important set of contributions because it reminds us as much as anything that the roads that we use and the way in which we enforce and create and sustain safety standards must be done in a way that reflects the changing nature of road use.

The popularity of e-scooters in Victoria, and particularly in our built-up and metropolitan areas, is really testament to their convenience. They do enable people to travel, as was pointed out in a number of contributions, relatively short distances, in particular where intermodal connections are not perhaps as available as they might otherwise be, and this is something which, again, is able to be deployed when and as people need it where e-scooters are used.



Provided through sharing schemes, e-scooters have become a really practical and affordable transport option for people, and they do help to reduce congestion, which we know is one of the things that often causes people to spend hours in traffic getting from home to work or from home to the kids being dropped off at school or to sport or even for shopping and community purposes. So reducing that congestion, particularly in our growing suburbs, and also making sure that we can help to better connect people with those first- and last-kilometre connections is of essential importance.

But safety is of paramount importance, and this is where, again, the trial of e-scooter use under specific conditions back in December 2021 was something which in Ballarat we were able to expand and to selected Melbourne council areas, as has been pointed out by other speakers. Riders were required to follow the road rules, including in wearing helmets, adhering to speed limits and riding only in permitted areas. As I recall, Minister for Public and Active Transport Gabrielle Williams alongside the member for Wendouree Juliana Addison in the other place were spotted using e-scooters in Ballarat, resplendent in helmets, at the time that that trial began. This was really about making sure that we can establish through trials an appropriate framework for the way in which e-scooters can be shared and operate across Victoria.

We also committed to introducing legislation in 2025 to establish those minimum standards for e-scooter share hire operators seeking to operate within council areas, and this bill is a really important demonstration of that commitment. It also underscores the importance of the value of e-scooters, with ever present cost-of-living challenges, frankly, for communities and for households. They are a low-cost and also low-emission transport option, and they should not be ignored as part of the range of ways in which people can get around in their own ways and on their own terms.

Over the last three years Victorians have made millions of trips using e-scooters, and we have got some of the strictest regulations of e-scooters. But they are still a relatively new mode of transport, and this is where we do have room to improve compliance with safety rules and to support better enforcement. The bill empowers PSOs to issue infringement notices for specific e-scooter offences, enhancing enforcement capacity and encouraging safer rider behaviour. There are preapproval processes which have been discussed in the course of the debate, and there are standards that will be prescribed in regulation following the bill's passage. They might include helmet use and verification, zone management, parking management, footpath detection, the detection of intoxicated riders, verification that riders are not otherwise impaired, and vehicle requirements, including vehicle identification. We will also be making sure that existing provisions under the Road Safety Act 1986 requiring operators to enter agreements with councils are repealed and re-enacted under the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983, creating a unified regulatory approach.

Extending enforcement powers for PSOs is also important, enabling them to issue traffic infringement notices for e-scooter offences. This is something which only police officers can do at the moment, but the change aligns with PSOs' existing powers and reflects the role that e-scooters play in connecting people to public transport. As I said, that multimodal connection is so important for people to move well and effectively and efficiently around the city. It will also improve enforcement using existing resources and support, and it reflects our ongoing commitment to expanding safe, accessible and well-managed transport options for Victorians.

There have been some questions in the course of this particular debate and some areas where clarification has been sought, so I do just want to provide with the time I have available some context on, firstly, councils having the power to decide and implement their own minimum standard regulation – division 7, proposed section 207O – or whether they would be standardised statewide. Proposed section 207O of the bill enables the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister for Public and Active Transport to prescribe regulations that set the minimum standards that all approved category A sharing scheme operators must comply with. The bill does not give local councils an equivalent power to make regulations or set standards that would apply to all operators or operators permitted to operate in their local area, but councils are able to enter into agreement with preapproved sharing scheme operators. As a term or condition of such an agreement, local councils

are able to set requirements in addition to minimum standards that apply to all operators that are bespoke or unique to that particular council area.

There was also a question as to whether councils would be able to individually set the fees charged to approved category A scheme operators and in particular whether these fees could be used to fund parking bays for vehicles under the scheme. To provide a context and an answer to that, it is important to note that the bill enables the minister to prescribe in regulations a fee for assessing applications for the approval of sharing scheme operators, and while a fee is not intended to be prescribed when the scheme commences, if a fee were to be prescribed then this fee would not be provided to local councils. Instead the revenue would be paid into the government's consolidated revenue fund. The bill does not directly provide for fees to be prescribed that would fund local councils. However, as a term or condition of an agreement with a sharing scheme operator, local councils are free to set a fee to recover their costs associated with the agreement. The bill does not restrict a local council from establishing such a fee or the amount of the fee.

A further question that came to government in the course of the discussions around this bill relates to adherence to the regulations enforced following approval for a sharing scheme and whether the Department of Transport and Planning would have an ongoing role in ensuring that operators are doing what they say. There are a number of mechanisms to ensure that sharing scheme operators continue to comply with the prescribed minimum standards, and the bill provides that the term of approval for a sharing scheme operator is five years. After this time the approval lapses and operators will need to apply to the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning for new approval and to provide evidence that they are able to meet those minimum standards. Additionally, DTP has the power to monitor compliance during the term of approval. This would occur based on its own investigation of the operator or via intelligence and information from local councils. The Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning has the power to undertake a show cause process if it is satisfied that the operator does not meet the minimum standards, and under this process operators have an opportunity to submit evidence to show that they are complying with standards. Having regard to the submission from the operator, the secretary of DTP may also then choose to revoke or not revoke an operator's approval.

We had a further question in relation to the user experience and what it would be like if different councils had contracts with different companies, and in this regard the bill establishes a legislative framework for local governments to manage issues specific to vehicle-sharing schemes and their impact on amenity and accessibility. It enables local councils to opt in to these sharing schemes operating in their municipality and also set the conditions on how such schemes operate. However, the agreements only have effect in that local council area and not outside the boundary. This means that an e-scooter from a particular sharing scheme operator can only operate within the boundary of the local council the operator has an agreement with. Adjoining councils may decide to enter into agreements with different operators, so if that occurs then the hirer of an e-scooter would not be able to use that scooter across multiple councils. To address this, local councils may choose to enter into agreements with one or more sharing scheme operators, including those that have agreements with neighbouring councils. Entering into agreements with operators that have agreements with other councils would increase the area that a hirer could use the e-scooter in from a particular operator.

I hope that does provide some of the context in response to questions that were raised in the course of discussions around this bill. I want to thank people who have participated in the debate today, and I also just want to place on the record gratitude for the level of care taken to debate something which fundamentally comes down to road safety. It fundamentally comes down to the safety of road users, of e-scooter users and of the people around them. We know that common sense is always something that we should take with us when using a vehicle and in and around roads but also for the care and safety of others. On that basis I thank everybody for their contributions. I trust that the information that I have provided in summing up this bill will be of assistance to those who had sought it, and I commend the bill to the house.

**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) (16:45): 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.

*Business of the house*

**Orders of the day**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:45): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 to 5, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills*

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

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (16:46): I rise to speak on the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This bill basically makes a series of changes to a number of acts relating to roads and ports, most of which are uncontroversial; however, there are concerns about a few of the proposed changes. The amendments related to the Road Safety Act 1986 are largely uncontroversial. The changes around allowing professionals to be approved for taking blood samples in the case of drink driving offences do not warrant concern. And the changes that allow the Chief Commissioner of Police to authorise unsworn Victoria Police employees to issue infringement notices for offences detected by road safety cameras – we are talking fixed cameras such as those at intersections that are identified as trouble spots – seem logical given this is largely an administrative task. Sworn officers can then have this workload taken away so they can focus on other matters, and there are plenty of other matters that they can focus on where sworn officers are needed.

You only need to look at the youth crime crisis to know that the justice system is swamped and cannot cope. Sworn officers can be redeployed to incidents. We have seen crime rise rapidly over the last 11 years, to the point where we have got people afraid to even go to shopping centres. They do not feel safe walking home from a night out at dinner. They certainly do not have trust that community safety is a priority of the government. Victoria Police are struggling to recruit officers, which means resources are stretched even further amongst those that are still in the force. Allowing unsworn officers to undertake largely administrative tasks is a very small step to overcoming the huge challenges that are faced.

I met with police veterans recently in Ballarat – last week, actually – and they were reflecting on the days when they did not have to worry about criminals being released on bail every 5 minutes. Under the ‘toughest new bail laws’ – certainly not the case at the moment – they have lost faith in the justice

system. In Ballarat there has been a reported increase in car theft, which is the most common one. Family violence is, sadly, increasing as well, along with petty crime. The latest stats do not paint a good picture, so I say again: redeploying sworn officers to tackle these matters as opposed to them issuing fines with cameras that are stationary will be a very, very small way of tackling that huge problem of crime in the state. We must make sure that we stand with Victoria Police as they battle the crime crisis in this state. There can be absolutely no equivocation on that.

The reforms to consent for works on roads are a bit more problematic because the proposed changes give the government and councils more time to deal with works applications on and around roads. Under the changes, they can effectively stop the clock on applications for works and remove the deemed consent for some applicants where consent is automatically granted after a period of time. The proposed reasoning for this is about risk mitigation, ensuring safety is minimised and the damage is minimised on infrastructure when a clear and detailed process is followed, effectively stopping the clock, as was argued. This process is about doing that work. However, it is also the case that these changes can ease pressure on the Department of Transport and Planning, and in that process of stopping the clock time and therefore cost would be added to projects and important works that are needed for the community. These works can include but are certainly not limited to roadworks, utility relocations and works of a similar nature, usually involving property developments and housing. When we asked the minister's office and the department there were no examples provided of why the stop-the-clock provisions were needed and what had prompted the change, so we can only make the assumption that the stop-the-clock changes are more about easing pressure on the department than actually mitigating risk and issues of that nature.

I must say, roads have never been in a worse condition than they have been in my electorate in recent memory. Driving down the Western Highway to come to Parliament this week, it was clear that the maintenance program is well behind. There is one section near Ballan, in the seat of Eureka, where they literally get you to slow down to 80 k's an hour, not for any reason other than rough surfaces. Locals know that this section of road has been like this for a while and it has continually got worse because more signs have been put up than actual shovels in the ground to make a meaningful change, and locals just see the rough surface signs as an excuse not to fix the road. Sadly, this is all too common across many parts of my electorate and many other areas across country Victoria.

I have got to say it was absolutely awful to see two deaths along the Western Highway, one at Buangor and one at Warrak, both occurring between Beaufort and Ararat, which is in my electorate as well. I want to acknowledge the loss that has been experienced here. Every death on our roads is a tragedy. To the families I pass on my condolences. My understanding is that both incidents involved locals travelling along the highway and that the individuals, who I will not name, will leave a big hole in their communities. There have been calls for safety upgrades for a sustained period of time. Although that particular section of the highway was supposed to be duplicated quite a time ago, it has been delayed, which has resulted in a less than ideal stretch of road. Some have even labelled that part of the road the most dangerous stretch of road in Victoria, if not Australia.

Any delays associated with doing roadworks which are vitally needed could delay the implementation of safety upgrades as well. The Victorian Transport Association opposes the changes to the stop-the-clock provisions, noting the changes could be used to delay roadworks, while anecdotal discussions with planners and developers indicate that this is the exact sort of bureaucratic red tape that lengthens and delays projects, particularly housing developments. The longer a housing development is delayed, the more holding costs like land tax are felt before a developer can actually go to market and put a house out for sale – even a block of land. In essence, unnecessarily making these processes longer could mean it takes longer to bring new houses onto the market. When we are already in the middle of a housing and homelessness crisis, the government should be pulling every lever possible to responsibly ease the pressure on the housing market.

We all know that in Victoria there is a housing crisis – that is not in any doubt. The regulations around ownership of a second property in Victoria are cumbersome and excessive and disincentivise those

who have a second property to do anything with it except sell it. There are 130 regulations for rental providers, which can be very difficult to navigate, which is what we heard in the rental and housing inquiry earlier in this term of Parliament. We also know that land tax is having a huge impact on the holding costs of property owners. The vacant residential land tax and windfall gains tax are all having a real impact on the private sector bringing property, whether that is houses or land, to market.

I do not think anybody argues that there should be absolutely zero regulation. However, there is certainly over-regulation. This is felt by renters in particular, who pay higher rents when the costs are passed on to them. That is why young people are struggling to break out of the rental cycle and save up for a deposit for a house. Extra provisions, such as the provision in this legislation which allows somebody to stop the clock on roads in residential developments, only make the time it takes to bring a house to the market longer. It is another piece of regulation which elongates the process. The Urban Development Institute of Australia had similar concerns around the inefficiencies and delays, noting that growth areas' coordinating road authorities can often be under-resourced and slow to respond and that stop-the-clock provisions do not encourage timely responses. We therefore seek to introduce amendments to remove those clauses. If the clerks could distribute those amendments now, that would be appreciated.

#### **Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**Joe McCracken:** In the Road Management Act 2004 there are significant requirements for consent that already protect safety and mitigate risk to infrastructure, and although there was no government consultation when stakeholders were asked about this aspect of the bill, no contentious issues were raised.

I want to talk a little bit about ports as well. The introduction of the licensing scheme to regulate mooring services providers is supported by the industry and seems logical given mooring and unmooring are high-risk activities with regard to safety, potential damage to infrastructure and the general movement of vessels. Currently there is no prescribed fee for mooring services licensing, which will likely change in the future as 'any prescribed fee' is referred to in this bill. However, this should not be an opportunity for blatant revenue raising. Fees should be set in consultation with the industry. Changes in fees over time should be moderate and known well in advance of when they are set to be implemented.

When I was a councillor at Colac Otway Shire we were also the committee of management for the port of Apollo Bay on behalf of the state. I remember when I was mayor advocating to then Minister Pulford in this place for upgrades and support to enhance the structure of the port itself, given that it had been let go over a significant number of years. I have to say that at that particular point in time there was a very clear, distinct lack of interest in the port itself, and we actually wrote to the department saying, 'No, we're not going to continue as the committee of management for the port,' because the state at the time was not willing to invest in the infrastructure to actually get it up to even a very basic standard, which was a great shame. We were not asking for infrastructure like gold-plated bollards or anything like that; we were asking for infrastructure literally to save the seawall from collapsing into the sea, because it was in urgent need of repair. Thanks to our advocacy and the campaign that we ran with locals, community members, the seafood industry and council we managed to secure some funding – it was not everything that we would have hoped for – in order to at least get the seawall into a state where it was not going to collapse into the sea, which according to engineers at the time was a very real concern. The then federal government committed millions to support the redevelopment of the harbour precinct under the Geelong City Deal; however, there was still work to be done on the state front. I have to say it was good to have a partner in the then federal Liberal government, which invested in regional communities, even port infrastructure.

Fees for the use of ports assets currently exist. This bill seeks to clarify that ports are able to charge commercial rates and that ports can charge for services outside of port waters. We believe that the intention is cost recovery – and again, the fees should not be used to gouge money from the industry.

This was certainly one of the concerns that locals raised when those discussions were happening, as I outlined before, about handing over the Port of Apollo Bay management back to the state. Locals feared that the state would ramp up fees, and there was anecdotal evidence to support that in the conversations that locals had had with various people in state departments. If the government does intend to use that as a revenue-raising opportunity, I strongly urge the government to reconsider that. The commercial fishers and the recreational fishers will be up in arms – let alone locals, who understand that the impact a port can have on economic activity in a small community is very significant.

The suggested changes made in relation to ‘abandoned things’, namely vessels, could include other items. This relates to vessel removal, identification, establishment of ownership, disposal and the proceeds of sale. There are a significant number of abandoned vessels, so these changes are going to be supported.

With regard to the changes allowing the appointment of a CEO on a full-time or part-time basis, it was advised that in practice having a part-time CEO of a major agency would not happen, and there has been no such request for these arrangements.

In closing, we will not be opposing the legislation, but we hope to secure support for the stop-the-clock amendments regarding road infrastructure project amendments and to ensure that works are not unnecessarily delayed.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (17:00): I am pleased to speak in support of this bill today. This bill reflects our government’s commitment to public safety. It introduces important changes to safety on our roads, in commercial ports and across waterways. I will speak briefly about the roads and then focus on the ports.

This bill delivers important reforms to improve safety enforcement. The bill broadens the range of health professionals who can carry out drug and alcohol testing. Until now only medical practitioners were permitted to perform these tests. For rural areas with greater distances between health services that has been a challenge. Allowing other health professionals such as registered nurses and paramedics to conduct testing is a commonsense reform. This bill also extends the time limit for prosecuting hit-and-run offences from 12 months to 24 months, giving investigators more time to gather evidence. Another commonsense change is to allow non-sworn police employees to issue infringement notices for offences picked up on camera. Our qualified and skilled police officers have better things to do with their time than that. Streamlining approval processes for works on declared roads is also an important improvement to safety. The rules about which body is responsible for maintaining specific road infrastructure do not always reflect the reality on the ground. Often there are multiple authorities involved. This bill will mean that the responsible authority can be delegated. To fix this, the bill introduces a stop-the-clock function, a little bit like the planning scheme process. That is going to provide more clarity quicker around waiting for further information.

Moving on to ports, I want to focus particularly on the changes in this bill that relate to safety at ports. Australia is an island, and famously our national anthem says we are girt by sea. Our ports have been a central part of local and national economic life for millennia. The Gunditjmara people have a long and rich history in Portland, with evidence of their presence dating back for over 30,000 years. Portland and the coast around it were important sources of shellfish and other maritime resources. It is therefore unsurprising that the port became a focus for colonisation and the conflict it brought. Today Portland is a major shipping hub for bulk commodities, including grain, aluminium, minerals, fertiliser and animals, as well as a key facility for the local fishing industry and the tourism industry.

The Port of Portland is the largest sustainable hardwood chip export port facility in the world. Overall, the port employs 60 staff and handles \$2 billion in trade each year and in doing so plays a major economic role in Portland, in the south-west region and indeed in our state. With the upgrade of the Maroona line thanks to \$150 million from the Albanese Labor government the port will provide even

more direct international export services to most parts of western Victoria. It will also mean that the Port of Portland is on the national rail freight grid. While Port Fairy and the port of Warrnambool are owned by the state and managed by their respective local councils, the Port of Portland was one of those things that was sold off by Jeff Kennett and Alan Stockdale – very disappointing at the time.

To give you a visual context of the Port of Portland and how it operates right in the middle of Portland's central business district is what I want to do now. It is quite wonderful to see piles of cargo woodchip growing and contracting from the main street foreshore area. When cargo ships come in, the entire vista changes. Shoppers and residents of Portland can see when the wide range of maritime customers use the facility, from bulk cargo ships, cruise ships and live export vessels to fishing and recreational vehicles. So you can imagine that safety in ports is a very important issue. This bill introduces a range of changes designed to ensure that this is the case. It provides port managers with clear authority to formally determine that something has been abandoned. Abandoned vessels, goods and equipment are a high risk for collisions and pollution. Unfortunately port managers sometimes have to deal with these matters without the original owner, and that means that there is significant cost. The owner may not be identifiable or the vessel responsible for leaving the goods or equipment may be halfway around the world. This bill sets out a clear process for deciding if something has been abandoned, including a public notice, documentation requirements and the ability to dispose of perishable items without delay. An abandoned vessel can be a danger to port users. It can also do damage to the maritime environment.

On a related issue, the bill also clarifies that those responsible for the pollution, not just shipowners or port masters but others who operate vessels or even third parties, can be held responsible for their actions resulting in pollution. This will allow the state or the port owners to recover the costs of remediation from those who caused the problem. This is simply going to make the operation of ports more environmentally accountable and more environmentally sustainable.

Another important change this bill introduces is to allow a port manager to lawfully assume the role of harbourmaster where a formally appointed harbourmaster is not available. This removes the ambiguity about who can make decisions and take responsibility when the harbourmaster is not there.

The bill also enables local port managers to offer technical advisory and maintenance services. They can do so within and around their port area to organisations like local councils. This will help ensure maritime infrastructure, such as jetties, navigation aids and storage facilities, is well maintained and fit for purpose. These fees can be set to recover costs or reflect commercial rates and can be varied depending on circumstances. This keeps flexibility to allow for emergencies and compassionate grounds. There are all sorts of scenarios that happen at ports, particularly international ports.

The mooring provision: the bill introduces a licensing scheme for mooring services providers, which means that only qualified operators can secure and release vessels. It makes it a clear offence for unlicensed operators to do so. Obviously this is all about safety and knowing the risks of various different activities.

It will also support fairer and more transparent use of public mooring spaces and prevent hoarding of moorings, which is a great irritation particularly for yachties. Importantly, it will help protect sensitive maritime habitats. Poorly installed or abandoned moorings can destroy seagrass beds and damage ecosystems. These reforms are commonsense reforms and bring a suite of changes that bring this act into the modern and fit-for-purpose state that it needs to be in. I commend the bill to the house.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:09): I am pleased to rise this afternoon and make some brief comments on the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. In doing so I want to acknowledge that it crosses over a number of portfolios, indeed the ports and marine safety portfolios and the roads and road safety portfolios, and that safety in our marine habitat for our marine users, our boaters, and also on the roads should be uppermost and paramount in the government's focus and mind.

This morning I listened most intently while we had the condolence motion for the Honourable Brian Dixon, and we heard about his introduction of seatbelts into Victoria as a world-leading innovation. We look and see how sensible and normal that is, but back in the day – I think it was around the 1970s just prior to those reforms being introduced – they would have had pushback from people who did not think they needed it. But there were – and I have not looked it up – an astronomical number of people who were killed on our roads, and the introduction of that very important road safety initiative saw that figure plummet quite considerably by comparison. Unfortunately, now we see those fatalities on our roads creeping up, so initiatives that improve road safety should certainly be paramount.

This bill amends the Road Safety Act 1986. It alters the Road Management Act 2004. My colleague Mr McCracken spoke to the amendments that the Liberals and Nationals are bringing in in relation to stopping the clock and removing deemed consent, and I will speak to those a little bit in my contribution. This bill also establishes the licensing under the Port Management Act 1995 for mooring services, and it makes various other technical amendments.

In talking about roads, it is something that every good National Party MP and country Liberal as well knows is top. It is of paramount concern to so many of our residents, our constituents in our electorates, and I frequently hear people when I am up the street and talking to people – people write to us – that reducing the speed limit is not a substitute for road safety in terms of improving the quality of driver safety and road quality. It is a measure that this government is introducing and has in recent years, a very poor substitute for actually looking at and improving the road surface. And we have seen my colleague Mr Danny O'Brien, the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety, do a considerable amount of work in the media but also through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the like to point out the fact that whilst the government spruiks high levels of road maintenance funding, the actual surface that the government through contracts is able to deliver has plunged to really an appalling low. So when government considers funding, it also has to consider value for money and facilitating the best quality outcome for – in my case, Eastern Victoria people – regional people about the safety of their roads. I have got a list as long as your arm in terms of roads that are desperate for maintenance, for upgrades, for shoulder improvements and for pothole improvements. I might even, if I have time, look to go into some of those as well.

The provisions in this bill certainly speak to one particular area in relation to the Chief Commissioner of Police having the power to enable unsworn Victoria Police employees to issue camera-detected infringement notices for offences detected by those road safety cameras. I have been very fortunate recently – I do not want to jinx myself, but you are very conscious about setting your speed so that you are not going to go over the speed limit. But we do need these detection cameras, because they do save lives and, particularly where people understand them, you know that people are slowing down. That ping, that infringement notice, hurts when it comes, and as I say, I have not had one for many, many years because I am focused on driving safely around and getting home at night. But for those people, this bill introduces that unsworn VicPol members can present those notices, freeing up sworn police officers from this administrative task.

I note that the Police Association of Victoria would prefer that we continue to have sworn officers doing this role, and I note their concerns around that. Really, listening to the Chief Commissioner of Police yesterday on the radio, he has been brought in by the Allan government, after 10 years of having a Labor government, to actually clean out the mire that we find ourselves in in terms of crime in our state and for community safety to be enhanced. He has got a colossal task ahead of him, and I note that the government and he are working closely together. Well, that is great. But the outcomes in our communities are what is vital for this new commissioner. I also note that he said on radio, and I often have too – and probably this is why TPAV is concerned about moving away from sworn officers – that there is a dearth. There is a gap. There are around 1100 vacancies across the state for sworn officers. There are also at any one time somewhere around 700 to 800 vacancies, with people on WorkCover or extended sick leave. That is a concern. He also acknowledged the litmus test that overall more members are wanting to leave the force than is appreciated, and this is because they have been



facing the stress and strain of this government for so long. Indeed they are still not forwarding and facilitating enough to replace them. So they are all on the list of the police commissioner.

What I also know – and I raised this issue this morning in terms of crime in our region – is the fact that retail crime is on the rise, and unfortunately Victoria is the retail crime capital in the nation, with somewhere around an 89 per cent increase on the last year. In relation to that I wish the police commissioner good luck, and I wish every officer and non-sworn officer in our state good focus and good outcomes, because certainly we need them. Our communities need improved police safety and community safety.

Looking at the introduction in this bill of a licensing regime for mooring services providers in order to enhance safety and compliance, this is also another really important area. I notice that it is a really vital area. We are, as a member for Western Victoria Region spoke about, girt by sea. We certainly have a long coastline, and my Eastern Victoria Region is part of that. But the important thing is that we do have safety for our boat users. It was good to speak with the Boating Industry Association of Victoria yesterday and to see the good work they do in advocating for safer boating outcomes and safer moorings, and they certainly highlighted some of the issues. Just to put it on record, there are somewhere around 450,000 marine licences, 900,000 boating participants and over 200,000 registered boats. This is a really important area, and safety must be paramount at that. Indeed one thing that they raised – and I think it crosses over into my area – is sometimes there is a shadow area or a grey area with the interaction down at our ports and in coastal communities between port maintenance and port infrastructure and between the Minister for Ports and Freight and the Minister for Environment. Often some of that land is in control of either Parks Victoria or the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. So there are a lot of interactions between different ministers, and there needs to be certainly streamlining of that safety. Again, I could give you a list as long as my arm on some of the improvements that need to happen. Jetties have been closed, and there is a level of frustration, particularly with the people down at Newhaven, around the closing of very important and very well loved and well used infrastructure and jetties.

The topic that I would like to get to of course is in terms of the Road Management Act 2004 and the section that looks at reform for consent for works whereby there can be a hold – a ‘stop the clock’ on this. It sounds good in principle, but we know – and I am not having a go at anyone in particular – that the wheels of VicRoads move very, very slowly and that local councils can be caught up in this and other entities and developments as well. What we are concerned about in relation to the addition of the stop-the-clock mechanism is it could delay and delay and delay further roadworks and approvals, and I thank Mr McCracken for circulating our amendments that will be dealt with in committee of the whole. What we also understand in talking with the stakeholders, from some of the conversation that our shadow ministers, both Danny O’Brien and Roma Britnell, have had, is that there was no substantial stakeholder consultation around this stop-the-clock clause and that there is a frustration about this. We are concerned, and we want to stop the clock on the ‘stop the clock’.

In finishing my comments I just want to put on record again some of the areas which are causing great frustration in relation to developments with either VicRoads or indeed VicTrack. There is a particular spot in Traralgon that I know I campaigned on – I think it was back in 2016 – about Bank Street and Waterloo Road. There is a major intersection at Bank Street that considers the VicTrack railway line and the highway, and we are still waiting. There have been some roadworks done, and we acknowledge that, but we are still waiting for traffic lights to go on there. There have been fatalities there in the past, which is of course – and we heard it before from Mr McCracken – devastating for families who have lost loved ones in these sorts of incidents.

We also note in East Gippsland – a very important space for those wonderful people that live there – the role of both commercial and recreational port activity there for safe and efficient infrastructure. My dear colleague Mr Tim Bull in the other house has been phenomenal in his advocacy post the 2019–20 bushfires. We have still got delays on bridges. We have still got delays on cabins on public

land and on public moorings. We are still waiting for those to be developed and re-upgraded post those fires.

Also, the one that is so lamentable – and my colleague Darren Chester, the federal member for Gippsland, has spoken about it on a number of occasions: \$10 million was provided by the then Liberal and Nationals government on this particular issue for the upgrade of the Mallacoota-Genoa Road. It was in 2020 that that funding was announced. We are now in 2025. It is a one road in, one road out community, and yet this community is still waiting. The government came out and said the federal government has only now released the funding for stages of that project. The issue is of course that the government may well not have asked for it up until last week. I support this bill in terms of its not-opposed position, and I ask the house to accept our amendments.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:24): I would also like to say a few words on the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As others have stated, this bill covers a very wide range of areas. It is rather an omnibus bill amending many different acts, and many of the things that this bill does the Libertarian Party does not really have a problem with. However, there is one clause in the bill in particular that I feel if I do not point out and take a stand on then no-one will, and this is clause 70, around the chief investigator for transport safety. This is around powers of entry. Now, we have seen this many times since I have been elected to this place – where the government has given powers of entry to authorised officers and many other different arms of government. There are problems with these – and I will go through some of those in a moment – but powers of entry are always a problem for people who care about individual rights, and although the bill does have some limitations on residential premises, it is not clear to me how this will work if someone is living on a boat, for example, that the chief investigator for transport safety wants to access, and some people do live on boats.

Also I have got concerns about why these documents are being made exempt from freedom of information requests as a default provision. Some sensitive documents might exist in some investigations, but these can already be exempted from FOI on a case-by-case basis. The government claims that this is to encourage people to provide documents in the first place when requested, by protecting those documents from public scrutiny.

Also, reverse onus liability is very problematic. The government claims that the right is not unfairly limited because information provided may not be admissible as evidence against the person in a criminal proceeding or proceeding for the imposition of a civil penalty, and the government also claims that the limit is not arbitrary because it is to achieve the legitimate aim of marine safety. But this way of thinking ignores the fact that a person has the right to silence, and an investigation of marine safety does not create some sort of exemption to a person's right to privacy under the charter. The bill does have some warrant provisions, and these search powers should have been included within those powers. I do not accept the government's justification for these arguments for these new powers. I have seen this many times – where, as I said, authorised officers are given these new powers of entry, powers of seizure – and I think it is time for this Parliament to draw a line under this and say, 'No more.' If you want to collect documents or if you want to gain access to something, get a warrant.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:27): I rise to speak on the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025, which is currently before the chamber. This bill is about modernisation and improvements across the transport sector, improving safety and efficiency on our roads and improving safety and efficiency at our ports. Road safety is an issue that affects every Victorian. We all use roads in one way or another, and I know in my community of Southern Metro Region that people use the roads in many different ways. At any time of the day you will find motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users all sharing the roads as they go about their business. I think we can all agree that the issue of road safety is important to everyone and having roads that are safe benefits everyone, so when somebody breaks the road rules and shows disregard for everyone else's safety as well as their own, it affects everyone. In these situations it is important that police have the ability to hold people to account to enforce our road safety laws.

In this bill we are seeking to address three key issues in road safety enforcement. The first is addressing the 12-month time limit for the police to bring proceedings for summary offences. Hit-and-run offences which lead to death or serious injury are indictable offences and are therefore not affected by the time limit being adjusted in this bill. On the other hand, hit-and-run offences which inflict minor injuries are considered to be summary offences and so are subject to this time limit. There is a good reason for this, and this time limit was implemented with the best of intentions. Victims deserve justice, and they deserve a justice process which is timely and does not drag on for years. However, an adverse effect of this time limit is that in some cases perpetrators can evade justice altogether if investigations go on for longer than a year. By extending the time limit on this particular offence from 12 months to 24, we are seeking to ensure that the police are given the time they need to conduct a thorough investigation.

The second change to road safety enforcement in this bill, which will better enable our police to keep our roads safe, is increasing the number of people authorised to take blood samples in cases related to drink driving and drug driving. Often in situations where a driver suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs is pulled over by the police a blood test will be required. In these situations, the blood samples must be taken within 3 hours of the individual driving the vehicle. Not only this, but the blood sample must be taken by a registered medical practitioner or approved health professional. It is important that we maintain strict and reliable procedures in road safety enforcement so that we can ensure the integrity and accuracy of the system. That is why these requirements exist. But we also do not want a situation where a blood sample cannot be taken because the police are unable to reach a registered health practitioner or approved health professional in time. As such this bill will enable a broader range of qualified health professionals to be approved to assist the police in collecting these samples. This will help ensure that the police can be efficient and accurate when dealing with drink- and drug-driving offences.

The third change is related to improving the enforcement of the road rules and refers to the issuing of infringements for offences detected by speed cameras. As it stands, these infringements can only be issued by a sworn police officer, which can be a drain on police resources, especially given the expansion of the number of offences that can be detected by camera in recent years. Therefore this bill seeks a change which will enable Victoria Police employees who have been given written authorisation by the Chief Commissioner of Police to issue these infringements as well. This will allow for a better allocation of resources within the police force and allow sworn police officers to share a part of their workload with unsworn employees of Victoria Police. With that I commend the bill to the house.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:31): I also rise to speak on the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. My colleagues have already covered the positives of the bill, but every piece of legislation carries a philosophy, spoken or unspoken, about what government is for. Labor's socialist philosophy is all about big corporatised government, about hoarding power and wealth. When they see a problem, their instinct is not to solve it but to invent a new tax or levy so that they can take their cut and grow their control. They market each bill as a fix to a problem to win public support, but the fine print always tells the truth. Just like with this bill, it is more overpaid bureaucrats with more power to take more money indefinitely without ever having to prove that the job was done. Liberals believe that the state should do the opposite: limit itself, publish the numbers and end levies once their purpose is complete. This bill, clause by clause, reflects that fundamental divide.

Let us start with our roads, because nothing reveals a governing philosophy faster than the state of the bitumen, other than perhaps child safeguards of course. Over the past three years road maintenance budgets collapsed from \$200 million to \$37 million. The total kilometres of roads resurfaced fell by 95 per cent. Our road safety statistics are damning, fatalities and serious injuries increasing every year – real people just trying to get home safely now dead or injured on unsafe, poorly managed roads. Deaths on country and peri-urban roads like those feeding into my own communities rose 23 per cent.

The Victorian Farmers Federation now directly links deteriorating road quality to rising fatalities. The government's response has been to lower the speed limits. And when road maintenance funding is cut to service Victoria's record \$194 billion in debt, the damage shows up fast. When asked for real-world examples to justify these changes, the department could not provide any. The Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Victorian Transport Association, who build homes and move freight, warn this change will choke growth corridors and raise costs in a cost-of-living crisis and a housing crisis. Labor markets this goal as safety, but the real effect is delay, and the real purpose is to bury the accountability for safety. By removing deadlines and default approvals they ensure that no department ever has to explain why the roads still crumble or why the permits still have not moved.

This bill responds to Victorians frustrated with poor road management, but not with accountability, action or funding. This is nothing more than new red tape. The amendment abolishes deemed consent for roadworks and introduces a new stop-the-clock power for complex applications. Deemed consent is the idea that if a government authority does not respond to a road permit or an application within a set time, say 60 or 90 days, the application is automatically approved by default. It is viewed as a safeguard against silent delays. It is meant to ensure that if the government cannot give you an answer in time you can still get on with the job. This bill scraps that protection, but what it does not do is hold the approving authorities liable for failing to respond to a clear service standard. It gives departments the ability to wait as long as they like to respond, with no consequence. Too bad if your small business is trying to do its job and fix roads and road infrastructure and make it safe for fellow Victorians. If the government just does not get around to it, then your permit application will just sit there – and so will your workers and your equipment, and the roads still will not be fixed.

Then comes the second change, the stop-the-clock power, which means that even if a deadline does exist, they can pause the countdown whenever they declare that an application is complex. A 60-day time limit can suddenly stretch to 90 or 120 or more. It is a way of appearing to have deadlines whilst avoiding them altogether. Instead of clear timelines and accountability via default approvals, we will now have open-ended silence and ever more bureaucratic loopholes. This is the white-collar road-worker equivalent of standing around leaning on shovels, but this time the government can do it via officers in Spring Street. Every politician loves to open a shiny new road. We do not open the repair of a pothole. There are no ribbons to be cut, no media, no cameras and no votes for just doing those basics well. How about the Allan Labor government does its job properly and assesses permits in a reasonable time and actually manages the road network properly.

Now onto our ports. Ports are trade arteries, but in Victoria they have also become cash machines for Labor's addiction to debt. With \$29 million a day now being spent on interest payments alone, this bill empowers port managers to impose their new prescribed fees for mooring and other services. A prescribed fee is a government-authorised charge set by regulation, not negotiation, for using public infrastructure or services. In this bill these fees come with no cap, no expiry date and no legal requirement to prove the results. This means that port users can be charged more and more without any link to performance and without any end in sight. In 2023 Station Pier fees rose 15 per cent, supposedly for maintenance. Cruise operators fled and Victoria lost over 100 ship visits and \$28 million in tourism income. Fewer ships mean more trucks and more diesel fumes for families in the western suburbs, but the fees remain. It is one of more than 60 new taxes and levies Labor has introduced over the last decade.

Meanwhile, solutions promised by these charges have stalled. The port rail shuttle, touted as the answer to truck traffic, is now delayed to 2029, and the western intermodal freight terminal was shelved, even after \$400 million was spent. Let us not kid ourselves that this is going to be some noble user-pays reinvestment scheme – with Labor, it never is. Just look at the so-called commercial passenger vehicle levy that was meant to compensate former taxi licence owners. It was supposed to end in 2026, but it is still there, pulling in tens of millions every year, while the ex-owners of the taxi licences have had their lives ruined and remain in debt. Or the emergency services property levy – that

was marketed as a way to fund the CFA and is now used like a second land tax on regional families and volunteers. Labor does not tax to fix. They tax to fund themselves, and they never, ever stop.

This bill also deepens the quiet centralisation of authority in our ports system. Where once local harbourmasters guided decisions, we now have a rebranded authority with no marine credentials. Community-designed redevelopment plans were junked so that consultants could rewrite them from scratch. This bill rolls investigative powers into a single act while removing parts of the freedom of information coverage. The scope expands, but scrutiny retreats. And the result? Heritage sheds vanish, fishing berths dry up and consultants pocket another million dollars for a fresh lens. The bill is not about safety or efficiency; it is about power and money. In the fine print, they quietly centralise authority, remove accountability and give themselves more power to tax forever, without ever proving delivery. It is not governance, it is exploitation by regulation, and I urge the house to accept our amendments.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This bill makes several amendments across a number of pieces of legislation. Among other things, it establishes a licensing framework for the provision of mooring services at specified commercial ports, improves their operation and extends the time Victoria Police must bring proceedings for certain hit-and-run offences. My contribution today focuses specifically on the changes this bill makes to the Road Safety Act 1986. This bill seeks to expand the classes of people who can take blood and urine samples to detect drink and drug driving offences. While we do not necessarily have a problem with this amendment, if resourcing is the issue, we would like to offer an alternate solution, one that we have been calling for ever since we have been elected. On that note, I will be moving amendments on this bill, and I ask that they now be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**Rachel PAYNE:** Since day one we at Legalise Cannabis have advocated for medicinal cannabis patients to be treated like any other person on legally prescribed medication who is not impaired when driving. It is deeply regrettable that when Victoria first legalised medicinal cannabis in 2016, no forethought was given to the need to reconsider our driving laws. Almost 10 years later it continues to be an offence to drive with cannabis in your system, regardless of whether it is medicinal cannabis taken as prescribed and not causing impairment. Other lawful prescription medication is not treated this way. There are far more impairing drugs that we do not test for, things like opioids and benzodiazepines. Some people are taking these instead of medicinal cannabis because they know that if they get pulled over at a roadside drug test, it will not come up on that test. For others who decide to go without entirely, they are left managing the symptoms of their condition. Instead of having an unimpaired medicinal cannabis patient on our roads, you get someone struggling with crippling insomnia. Now, that is hardly a safer alternative.

We understand the Victorian government recognises this issue and has dedicated both time and money to addressing it through its controlled, closed-circuit driving trial to assess the effects on driver performance. It is expected that this will conclude sometime next year, meaning any potential change to legislation is realistically not going to happen until the next term of Parliament. In the interim we commend the government on passing an amendment to the Road Safety Act to provide magistrates with discretionary powers not to cancel a medicinal cannabis patient's licence if they are driving while not impaired. However, while we wait, there are thousands of medicinal cannabis patients in Victoria who risk being criminalised every time they drive. This driving trial will only tell us what we already know from similar studies: medicinal cannabis patients can and do drive safely. Tasmania's laws have allowed medicinal cannabis patients to drive if unimpaired for many years now, and the sky has not fallen in. This amendment would provide that prescription medicinal cannabis that does not impair driving is to be treated in the same manner as other prescription drugs. It is just common sense, and there is no need to continue to wait.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:43): I rise to speak today on the Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Bill 2025. The Roman Empire understood something that this government does not seem to understand, and that is that roads and ports build civilisation itself.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** I just want to say I love it when Minister Shing is in here, because it really does spice things up. Roman engineers did not build roads to nowhere; they built them to move armies, goods, people and ideas and to do it efficiently. Their ports were not just revenue-gathering exercises, they were gateways to building communities and prosperity. When the former Prime Minister Robert Menzies championed regional road development, he understood that same truth: regional roads are not just strips of bitumen, they are lifelines. We understood this when Mallacoota was engulfed in flames recently and there was one road in and one road out. So many people were, sadly, stranded there and had to be rescued by the navy. Roads are not just bitumen. They carry produce from farm to table, they are keeping food affordable for families, they ensure fire trucks reach burning homes and communities on time, they get ambulances to victims that need life-saving assistance and they connect isolated communities.

Before I address the chaos on Victoria's roads and in its ports, I would like to highlight a couple of clauses in this bill. This bill proposes that police infringement notices would be handled by Victoria Police employees. This clause is a clear admission that police numbers are insufficient, and instead of addressing the issues, the government is merely shifting the responsibilities to police employees. The second one I want to highlight is the extension of the investigative powers for hit-and-run. This provision seems also to stem from low police numbers and lack of resources. We know that many cases remain unsolved and uninvestigated due to inadequate resources. These are temporary solutions that really are not going to address the underlying causes.

There are a few things specific to my area of Eastern Victoria Region that I just want to put on record. The statistics are absolutely shocking. Let me give the house some facts that this government would prefer to hide. Road maintenance funding has declined by 45 per cent in the last four years. The truth is the condition of our roads are the worst that I have seen them. They are apparently the worst that a lot of my constituents have seen them. This is not political. It is a fact that is echoed by a lot of people that I talk to. The government's own performance data reveals the truth. Resurfacing spending has collapsed from \$200 million to \$37.5 million. Only 422,000 square metres of regional roads were rehabilitated in 2023–24 compared to the 9 million square metres in the previous year. Year after year Labor ministers announce a regional road blitz, yet their own department data shows that the works are absolutely plummeting. The RACV survey, a community survey, highlighted some real issues. The most recent RACV survey reveals the scale of community concern. Sixty-four per cent of respondents identified poor road quality and potholes as their main safety concern, up from 46 per cent in 2021. The worst affected roads included Bass Highway from Jam Jerrup to Leongatha, the Great Alpine Road between Bairnsdale and Wangaratta, the Princes Highway between Stratford and Bairnsdale and of course Phillip Island Road. These are arteries of eastern Victoria, and they are failing.

I just want to quickly touch on Pakenham's infrastructure crisis. It is one that I have spoken about quite a few times here. Pakenham has experienced explosive growth, population growth at an unprecedented rate, but the infrastructure investment has not kept up. Federal coalition funding for crucial road upgrades remains incomplete. Roadworks create traffic chaos from Monash Freeway while potholes erupt across Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road. McGregor Road suffers severe congestion. Residents struggle with intersections like Henty Road and Rogers Street, desperately calling for traffic lights and roundabouts. The Department of Transport and Planning have stated that there are no plans for upgrades at the Toomuc Valley Road and Princes Highway intersection, the main entrances for Beacons Hills College, despite repeated petitioning by locals to have that problem solved.

Another one that has been a huge issue and one that has been raised many times in this place is the Lang Lang bypass. A lot of locals say they feel that it is trucks versus children, and it remains unresolved. The minister recently met with some of the locals there. Unfortunately, the meeting had to be delayed because there was a person travelling to the meeting that got killed on the road. It is absolutely devastating. There are significant risks there that need to be dealt with and need to be addressed, and I hope they will be dealt with and addressed. Our roads connect and strengthen communities, and I think we need to remember that. This government sometimes builds projects that are vanity projects that are putting all of their eggs in one basket and that the whole state is paying for but the whole state does not benefit from. I believe that this government needs to build for purpose, not just for politics, and this bill fails that test comprehensively. It provides legislation that will mask problems and ignore the real crisis facing regional Victoria.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (17:50): Today has been a pretty wideranging debate for a wideranging bill. I want to just sum up with some of the observations that have been made by speakers today around the primary purpose of the bill – namely to strengthen safety across the road and port networks and improve the way in which we manage our transport infrastructure and enforcement. There are a number of acts which are amended by this bill, including through road safety enforcement, management of works on public roads, regulation of high risk mooring services at commercial ports, assistance for local port managers to better maintain and operate key infrastructure, clarification on marine pollution response and updated liability caps, and support for a no-blame transport safety investigations function with clearer powers. So at first blush it does appear to be an omnibus miscellany of transport reforms, but the truth is it is actually part of ongoing reforms to assist with continuing and tireless efforts to make smart and safe legislative changes that benefit all Victorians.

I might just start where previous speakers finished off in relation to a number of comments that have been made about the safety of our roads. Nobody cavils with the important position that safety is of primary importance, and again, when we committed \$976 million to roads in this year's budget, it delivered another record year of funding to fix potholes and upgrade road surfaces in every corner of the state. There have been comparisons to the Roman Empire. I cannot quite believe that we have ended up here again. I suspect a *Hansard* search might yield some pretty wideranging contexts in which this epoch has been referenced.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** As Mr Batchelor just said, all roads do lead there. Also, it is important to note that road traffic and vehicle movements were not even vaguely comparable to what we are seeing now. Millions and millions of movements across our road networks have required a record investment into making sure that they are upgraded, maintained, resurfaced and repaired in a way that reflects need and also commits to long term improvement. This is where we are again making sure that we have got a \$6.6 billion 10-year strategy to plan long term and make sure that we have got an equipped strategy to cater to our rapid growth and increasing freight task. Again, the Romans never dealt with B-doubles or large volumes of materials and commodities heading to market. That intermodal connectivity was never part of the challenge faced by the Roman Empire.

Again, we can have an exercise of relativity here, but let us make it a meaningful one. On the point of comparison, let us have a little exercise in facts, just for the sake of *Hansard* and for clarity. The average spend under our period in government has been around \$740 million in yearly funding toward maintaining our roads. To compare and contrast that with those opposite on an annualised basis, that number is \$493 million. That is averaged out. The opposition spent on average in their last term in government per annum \$493 million, and for our period in office on average there has been \$740 million in yearly funding. Again, this is work that needs to continue irrespective of who is in office, and again, that \$6.6 billion 10-year strategy is part of making sure that we are putting road safety and a better capacity-building process across our road network front and centre.

We want to make sure also that our transport system keeps up with rapid growth and make sure that we have also got the central planks of safety, efficiency and resilience built in, because we know that incomplete, unregulated or poorly planned works manifestly put lives and safety at risk and they also present significant risks to infrastructure. Ports and roads are part of the lifeblood of our economies and our communities. They deserve strong oversight and also smart regulation, and because every Victorian has the right to feel safe, whether they are walking or using our roads or adjacent to our roads or working in and around our ports, safety is of primary importance.

The bill, on that point, gives Victoria Police more tools to hold unsafe drivers to account, including more time to investigate hit-and-run offences and broader access to health professionals for drug-driving testing. This is where again I note the comments made by Ms Payne in respect of the amendments being proposed and also the commentary and contributions being made by a number of speakers around this chamber around the impact of road fatalities and collisions on our communities. Nobody has been untouched by the road toll, and it is absolutely essential that road safety transcend party politics. It must be the case, and again, some of the contributions here today give me a measure of hope that indeed that can be the case. Reducing the risk of unplanned or unsafe works proceeding through deemed consent and introducing a stop-the-clock mechanism so that all roadwork applications have the proper information are a really significant part of this bill. There is a little bit of misinformation or misapprehension that I do want to correct in the course of the committee stage in addressing the coalition's amendments here. We also want to make sure that we are freeing up police for frontline duties by allowing authorised employees to issue camera-detected infringements.

Moving on from road to sea, the bill protects port workers with a new licensing scheme for mooring services. As Ms Ermacora referred to in her contribution, western Victoria is significantly dependent upon port functions, as are a number of areas around the state, so I am grateful for the contributions she has made in focusing her attention port functions. Making sure that port managers can act quickly on abandoned vessels and charge fair fees for vital maintenance services is important as well – again, something which Ms Bath touched on. Modernising marine spill liability is also important. This is something which has featured in public discussion around policy settings intermittently, but we all know that when and as there is any issue around marine spill, it is something which activates people to call for responsibility resting with polluters and not taxpayers as that relates to clean-up.

There are two amendments that have been proposed today. The government will not be supporting either of the amendments. I just want to touch on them quickly before perhaps we go into committee. I might start with Ms Payne's amendment. Thank you for the conversations and discussions that we have had. It is always a really important process for us to have conversations with you, not just about the substance of the amendments and the positions that you take but also about the form in which they might appear or otherwise be addressed in the course of committee stages or engagement with ministerial offices, departments and the Legalise Cannabis Victoria party. THC remains a banned drug because it is known to impair driving. There is strong evidence that THC, which is the active component in many medicinal cannabis products, almost doubles the risk of a crash compared to a drug-free driver. Having said that, Victoria is leading the way. As people well know, no other state is doing more to understand how medicinal cannabis affects driving. Again, this is the distinction between presence and impairment, which has occupied the minds and challenged the skill and the expertise and the common sense in policymakers' minds for many, many years. We funded the world-first \$5 million driving trial to get some really significant and baseline comparative evidence before making further changes, and that trial is currently underway. Ms Payne and Mr Ettershank I understand actually visited the trial track with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety –

**Rachel Payne** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** There we are. Ms Payne has indicated that she passed with flying colours. I am not sure whether I should congratulate you, Ms Payne, or just stand here in silent admiration. Not having been silent before in my life, I will go with the former. I do just want to make sure that we do



finish the trial before we rewrite any laws. We do not want to jump the gun, because doing that would undermine the science. We do need to follow through to a state of completion on this particular trial.

The amendment being put by Legalise Cannabis Victoria relies on assumptions that we just cannot verify at this particular point in time at the roadside. So again, this is a question of technology and it is a question of sequencing, particularly as that relates to the trial. Currently there is no reliable test to determine impairment rather than presence or to show if someone used cannabis legally and as prescribed. The basis upon which the cannabis THC has been consumed is not something that a test can determine at this point. These are the sorts of things that matter when it comes to understanding the challenges around presence, impairment and the purpose or rationale for the consumption of that product in the first instance, noting that there is a lot of self-medicating that occurs and a lot of other use of THC and cannabis products. In a study of medicinal cannabis users we did see that 44 per cent of respondents with a valid prescription reported that they had topped up with other cannabis products. Again, this is part of the ongoing discussions that we have been having with LCV and also Ms Patten in this place. I was part of a taskforce and the work in relation to medicinal cannabis use and its impact on road use a number of years ago. It is long term, difficult, tricky and challenging work that for a long time has confounded the minds of policymakers, and if it were easy it would have been done by now. The work does go on there, but we do need the facts before we make any changes.

The opposition has circulated an amendment which we will not be supporting, and I am very happy to provide some further detail on that. This is actually about safety and not delays. If someone lodges an incomplete application, which may have public safety risks, the very things that opposition members raised in the course of many contributions this afternoon, the clock should actually stop until they provide the full picture so only dodgy or rushed applications get held up. If you submit everything required, the clock keeps ticking, and we can get on with the works and we can continue that work apace. The opposition's plan to remove the mechanism would force road authorities to reject incomplete applications just to avoid deemed consent. That is really clunky and it is actually less efficient, and rejecting an application restarts the process and causes even more delay. Stopping the clock actually streamlines that process. Right now there is no set list of what must be submitted. The bill allows us to prescribe that in regulations, which will give everyone more clarity, certainty and consistency. If the clock cannot stop, bad applications might actually slip through, and that is the sort of situation that could and indeed may well put lives and infrastructure at risk – the very thing that we are all, based on the contributions made this afternoon, intending to address and prevent.

We want to make sure, again, that road users and their safety and our safety are front of mind. We want to make sure that common sense is front of mind, and this is where, again, we are looking to make sure that through the wide range of matters set out in this bill we can continue to achieve exactly that. It is consistent with the reforms that we have foreshadowed. It is consistent with our commitment to road safety and to better, smarter regulation, and on that basis I would commend the bill and move it to committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Instruction to committee*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger)** (18:03): I have considered the amendments circulated by Ms Payne, and in my view these amendments are not within the scope of the bill. Therefore an instruction motion pursuant to standing order 14.11 is required. I remind the house that an instruction to the committee is a procedural motion.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:03): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider an amendment and a new clause to amend the Road Safety Act 1986 to provide that medicinal cannabis that does not impair driving must be treated in the same manner as other prescription drugs.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Committed.**

*Committee*

**Clause 1 (18:05)**

**Rachel PAYNE:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 3 insert –
  - “(ia) to provide that medicinal cannabis that does not impair driving must be treated in the same manner as other prescription drugs; and”.
2. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 5 –
  - ‘5A Offences involving alcohol or other drugs**
  - After section 49(3C) of the **Road Safety Act 1986** insert –
    - “(3D) Subsection (1)(bb), (bc), (h), (i) and (j) do not apply to a person whose blood or oral fluid contains delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol from a legal cannabis product –
      - (a) which is a prescription drug; and
      - (b) for which the person has a prescription or other authority to obtain, possess and use that product; and
      - (c) which has been used in accordance with that prescription or authority.
    - (3E) For the avoidance of doubt, subsection (3D) does not operate to exempt a person from the application of subsection (1)(bb), (bc), (h), (i) and (j) in relation to any other prescribed illicit drug which may be present in the person’s blood or oral fluid.”.

I just want to acknowledge Minister Shing’s commentary in respect to the closed-circuit driving trial that is currently underway and that we are in a predicament here where we have had medicinal cannabis legal for nearly 10 years and are trying to find a balance there. Obviously Legalise Cannabis Victoria have advocated for medicinal cannabis patients to be treated like any other patient on prescription medication. We are talking about prescription medication, and I do take issue with claims that medicinal cannabis patients then top up with recreational cannabis. I could point to the fact that someone that may be prescribed a medication such as valium or benzodiazepine may also find themselves topping up their medication. So I think that looking at those distinctions might not be as relevant anymore when we are talking about looking at that distinction of prescription medication and patients’ rights.

**Harriet SHING:** I just want to again, perhaps for avoidance of doubt, indicate I was not suggesting in the course of my sum-up that this might well be a top-up with recreational cannabis; it might well be a level that exceeds a prescribed dose. Again, we just do not know, and so without knowing it is then very difficult to understand what the nature or the extent of impairment might be in any situation where medicinal cannabis has perhaps been prescribed to a certain amount. A top-up may occur because of a recreational volume but may actually occur because of a prescribed volume that is brought forward in dose, for example. I would hate for you to conclude that in fact I was suggesting that prescription cannabis was only ever sitting alongside, in that 44 per cent, the use of something other than prescribed volumes or amounts of cannabis as prescribed.

**David LIMBRICK:** The Libertarian Party will be supporting this amendment. I note some of the minister’s comments earlier about the science of this and testing for impairment. I would like to make the point that the whole reason for roadside testing is meant to be to test for impairment, because what everyone cares about is whether or not someone is impaired, not whether they have some substance in their body; they care whether they are a danger to other drivers on the road. It is very unfortunate that in the case of THC it stays in the body for a long period of time and is detectable well after someone is impaired.

I would say that if we are looking for the gap in the science, the gap in the science was when roadside drug testing was introduced in the first place, when they introduced a testing mechanism which did not test for impairment and which continues to not test for impairment. Many people are very unjustly being penalised, having their licences taken away and being put through all sorts of trauma, and they pose no risk to other drivers on the road because they are not impaired – but we do not know that because they never actually test, or rarely test, for impairment. I have been told in the last term in Parliament that the reason that they do not test for impairment – even though we have an impairment test, which is rarely used – is because it is very onerous on the police force and takes a long time. There is a lot of paperwork and a lot of stuff involved; they do not like doing it. The roadside drug test is a lot easier when you can just test someone and you do not need to actually prove that they are impaired. This is an injustice that should never have come about. It should never have happened. I do not actually care whether it is prescription medication or not, or indeed some illegal drug; what actually matters for road safety is whether or not someone is impaired. That is the only thing that we should be testing for, and that is not happening in Victoria at the moment.

I acknowledge that the government is doing these tests at the moment to try and come up with some sort of test for impairment, but in the meantime we have very large numbers of people who use cannabis for medicinal purposes. I have met many of these people. There are people who have lost their licences and people who could benefit from medicine who are choosing not to take that medicine. They are taking more dangerous medicines, such as opiates, which they do not test for and which do cause impairment, but for some unknown reason – well, actually, I know the reason. The reason that the government does not insist that we test for opiates and benzos as well as cannabis is because there is a social stigma on cannabis, and there does not seem to be a social stigma on opiates and benzos.

The company that produces the roadside drug tests that they use at the moment also produces another one for a very similar cost that tests for opiates and benzodiazepines. The government has not instructed the police to use this. They do not use it because they could be pulling half the drivers off the road; that is why. They are not going to introduce that because there will be an absolute uproar, but as the number of medical cannabis patients increases, the noise from these patients that are suffering this injustice will increase over time. It will get to the point – and I think even the government acknowledges this; that is why they have agreed to this roadside testing stuff that they are talking about – where it is unbearable, and the government will have to face the fact that what is happening is an injustice.

**Katherine COPSEY:** The Greens will be supporting this amendment. We thank Ms Payne for her continued advocacy on this matter and the reminder to the chamber and to the government of its importance. We hope to see it successful in its intent in the very near future, before the end of this term.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that Ms Payne's amendment 1, which tests her amendment 2, be agreed to.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (7):* Katherine Copsey, Anasina Gray-Barberio, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

*Noes (28):* Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

**Amendment negatived.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr McCracken, I invite you to move your amendments 1 and 2, which test your remaining amendments.

**Joe McCracken:** Short and sweet: basically we do not think the stop-the-clock provisions are helpful and we think they might actually elongate the process of trying to get road-related infrastructure in place. The amendments have been circulated. I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, line 20, omit “2004 –” and insert “2004 to enable responsible road authorities to be prescribed for certain road infrastructure; and”.
2. Clause 1, page 2, lines 21 to 25, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

**Harriet SHING:** The government will not be supporting the amendment. The changes do not impact upon the ability of road authorities, including councils, to maintain the roads for which they are responsible. Providing coordinating road authorities with a stop-the-clock mechanism on incomplete applications for consent for works will ensure that the authority can obtain the information required to be confident that the works will be carried out in a safe and appropriate way.

The changes to the consent-for-works application process will not impact upon councils’ ability to maintain their roads. A consent for work is not required for a council to perform roadworks on any road for which the council is the coordinating road authority, and timeframes to identify and respond to hazards on the road network are not impacted by the amendments in this bill. Response times for addressing hazards on roads are set out by road authorities in their road management plans, and road authorities responding to hazards on the road network do not need to apply for a consent for works.

There is no set list of information that applicants must provide; nor is there a stop-the-clock mechanism if a road authority receives an application that does contain all the information the authority needs to make an informed decision. After the changes in the bill we will have the ability to prescribe in regulations a list of information that must be provided with an application for consent for works. If an application is made without all this information, then it is incomplete and the clock does not start. The clock is effectively stopped when the road authority does an initial assessment of the application as received, concludes the application is incomplete and advises the applicant. If an application is made with all the prescribed information, then the road authority will not have the ability to stop the clock.

**David LIMBRICK:** Whilst I am sympathetic to the amendments moved by Mr McCracken, I do have some concerns about the incentive here that would be set up, as was pointed out by the minister – the incentive to actually decline the application to avoid deemed consent. I am not certain whether that is a real thing or not, but I am concerned enough that without further evidence I am not prepared to support this amendment.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Similarly, whilst we understand the concern that has been put forward by the opposition, we appreciate the minister’s efficiently, as usual, delivered explanation and will not be supporting the amendment.

**Council divided on amendments:**

*Ayes (13):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Richard Welch

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

**Amendments negatived.**

**Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 107 agreed to; schedule 1 agreed to.**

**Reported to house without amendment.**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:24): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:25): I move:

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

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (34):* Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

*Noes (1):* David Limbrick

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

*Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:31): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Tourism and major events**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:31): (1750) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and the action I seek is for him to update the house on the Allan Labor government's support for Victoria's major events calendar in order to grow our visitor economy. As a brand new grandmother of two, I am intrigued by the 'May the 4th' Lego Star Wars event – I know this is my future very soon – and the huge number of people that are visiting for that. This is another example of the blockbuster events strategy, and I am looking forward to a report from the minister.

**Renewable energy infrastructure**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:32): (1751) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that I seek is for the minister to seriously consider the feedback provided by community members and local government regarding the Central North renewable energy zone and address their concerns with the size and location of the zone and its misalignment with existing land uses and planning commitments. The *Draft 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan* was recently released for public consultation and brings together future planning for electricity transmission lines with proposed zones for renewable energy projects. Forward-thinking

planning for the integration of renewable energy projects into the grid is appropriate, but the Allan Labor government is using this plan to force large-scale renewable energy infrastructure onto unwilling rural communities.

Two of the renewable energy zones are in my electorate: the North-West REZ and the Central North REZ. The Central North zone is located between Bendigo and Shepparton and will cover 3440 properties over approximately 160,000 hectares. The size and location of the Central North zone are particularly worrying for community members as well as local government, because it overlaps significantly with high-quality agricultural land that is essential for food production in Victoria. The draft plan says that it intends to minimise impact on agricultural land and acknowledges that due to the complexity of irrigation infrastructure across the district the area is much less suitable to have co-located wind and solar infrastructure. However, despite this acknowledgement the plan ignores community objections and still chooses to include irrigation areas within the zone in order to give renewable energy developers more options for future projects.

This valuable land must be protected, not vandalised by Labor's industrial energy infrastructure. Covering the area with renewable energy projects will reduce land values without fair compensation, increase biosecurity risks and interrupt livestock movement and business operations. The draft zone also conflicts with council planning schemes and strategic documents prepared by the municipality to protect landscape values, economic opportunities, biodiversity and threatened species. The zone is expected to deliver 60 to 100 megawatts of capacity from wind energy facilities, which raises serious concerns with local residents that new, taller wind turbines will disturb the peace and quiet of rural communities by casting noise and shadow flicker much further than before. Last year I asked the government to replace the current 1-kilometre turbine setback requirement with a 2-kilometre buffer zone between wind turbines and homes, but the minister replied to say that the government is not currently reviewing this requirement. How can we believe that the consultation process is being carried out in good faith when the government has already refused to consider a demand for a larger buffer zone?

### **Maternal and child health services**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (18:35): (1752) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is for funding to be revitalised across the maternal and child health system. Increasingly my office is hearing from concerned parents across the state, and their stories are painting a worrying picture. The Victorian government is cutting maternal and child health services. For a long time local government has been warning that the state government's share of funding for maternal child health services has been dropping, and the results are now starting to be seen.

In late April I received an email from parents in the inner west of Melbourne. As their toddler was transitioning through important developmental milestones, they were troubled to find out that their council-run maternal and child health clinic had insufficient resources to meet demand. The service had placed the child on a waitlist for their 18-month key age and stage appointment, and by the time the next milestone at two years old rolled around they still had not been seen for the one that they missed.

Then in May whispers were circulating that funding for council-run sleep-settling services was being cut. A week out from the budget the council received the message: the Department of Health was not renewing this funding and they should locate additional funds or cut these critical services. Many parents were concerned that this essential support would soon be inaccessible for them.

Last year councils were told to sign on to the health department's new data system and pay \$2.32 per immunisation logged. Councils protested that this was just another cost-shifting exercise and would be difficult for them to absorb without cuts being made elsewhere. Then just weeks ago Western Health announced the closure of their walk-in childhood immunisation clinic at Joan Kirner hospital due to cuts to funding for that specialised program.

Childhood vaccinations, key age and stage appointments and sleep-settling services are all essential health care and foundational for the wellbeing and future prospects of entire generations. It is reckless of Labor to make these the subject of a cost-cutting exercise. These investments in early years maternal and child health services are broader than just those council-delivered services, but certainly they are an important part of them. These are absolutely critical. As we have seen with the failure of the government to effectively regulate the childcare sector despite years of warnings about the consequences, the message these service cuts sends to Victorian parents is that children and families are not a priority.

### **Beaconsfield level crossing removal**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:38): (1753) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the recent completion of the Beaconsfield level crossing removal, taking away this major bottleneck, which had the potential to cause many significant issues for the area as the areas to the south continue to grow, with continued residential development going on in the Berwick and Beaconsfield areas. It was great to be at the ‘thank you to the community’ event just a few weeks ago with the level crossing project team to acknowledge and thank the hardworking people that brought this project into life, with the new McKenna Drive appropriately named after one of the founders and influential people at St Francis Xavier College as well. Indeed it was even good to see the Leader of the Opposition there doing a press conference. He did not have any nice things to say about the project, which is a shame because we know that the Liberal Party continue to run down the investments in transport infrastructure, in schools and in improving transport services that are so important, especially for our growing outer suburbs. The action that I seek is an update on the completion of this very important project.

### **Energy policy**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:39): (1754) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, following New South Wales’s and South Australia’s decisions to introduce a so-called sun tax, a charge on households with rooftop solar panels for exporting excess electricity back to the grid. By way of background, the sun tax refers to a two-way rooftop solar export tariff, whereby households with solar panels are charged for exporting electricity during peak solar generation hours, typically between 10 am and 3 pm when the grid is overloaded, and may receive lower or no feed-in credits. This policy shift was authorised by the Australian Energy Market Commission and has begun rolling out in jurisdictions connected to the national electricity market. The New South Wales government has now introduced mandatory export tariffs, which will see solar households charged per kilowatt hour during the middle of the day, between 10 and 3, once a free threshold is exceeded. There are some incentives being offered for exports during peak demand periods. However, many solar owners are concerned that this marks the start of a broader move to penalise families who invested in renewable energy to reduce both their power bills and emissions. The New South Wales changes came into effect on 1 July this year. South Australia also introduced a sun tax in July this year.

In Victoria residents have embraced rooftop solar in record numbers in recent years. Many of these systems were installed in good faith, with the expectation that excess energy exported to the grid would be rewarded, not taxed. I have heard from residents who are very concerned about additional cost burdens on their households during a cost-of-living crisis. Some recent reports suggest the government will not consider introducing such a tax before July 2031, and I ask the minister to clarify these reports and advise if another new tax is being considered by the Allan Labor government.

### **Fur industry**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:41): (1755) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, although according to the government it could also be for the Minister for Agriculture or even for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Let me explain why. The action that I am seeking is for mislabelled fur products to no longer fall through the cracks and ultimately for a

complete ban on the sale of fur in Victoria, but the problem is nobody can tell us exactly who is responsible for it.

Recently Collective Fashion Justice in collaboration with the Animal Justice Party launched an investigation into mislabelled fur being sold in Victoria. The item in question was a vest labelled as 100 per cent Australian sheepskin or Australian wool, but forensic testing by my office and Collective Fashion Justice confirmed the vest was actually the skins of two domestic cats and likely one or two rabbits. This is not the first time we have uncovered mislabelled fur using forensic testing, and I will tell you how I know that it will not be the last. On 18 and 19 June a member of my staff submitted five separate reports of mislabelled fur to Consumer Affairs Victoria with the presumably reasonable expectation that follow-up action would be taken. But there has been no response, and as far as we know, no action has been taken at all, nor is there any indication that this will not happen again.

Until fur is banned consumers in Victoria will continue to be deceived and animals will continue to suffer. The global fur trade is extremely cruel. Animals including foxes, rabbits, raccoon dogs, dogs and cats are kept in cages and deprived of any natural behaviours before being gassed, electrocuted or even skinned alive. This is happening in countries with little to no animal protection standards, yet we allow the final product to be imported and sold right here in Victoria, with consumers often completely unaware of the suffering behind what they are buying.

We know that fur is out of fashion. A 2024 survey by FOUR PAWS Australia uncovered that 69 per cent of Australians believe that fashion companies should reduce their use of animal-derived materials and transition to animal-friendly materials instead. Melbourne Fashion Week and Australian Fashion Week have not only banned fur but all wild animal skins and feathers as well. Even the state government's own taskforce know that mislabelling is widespread, but it is clear that they just do not care enough to regulate it or they cannot work out who is supposed to regulate it. This industry is too cruel to fix and too outdated to justify, and so the action I seek is for a total ban on the sale of fur in Victoria.

### Arden precinct

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:44): (1756) My adjournment matter tonight is directed to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. Just a few kilometres from the CBD the Arden precinct is one of the most ambitious urban renewal projects in the state. Located right in the heart of Melbourne's growing inner suburbs, Arden is being transformed into a thriving new neighbourhood, one that will deliver thousands of new homes, jobs and public spaces over the coming decades. This is about more than just new buildings. It is about creating an entirely new piece of the city that is planned thoughtfully, sustainably and in partnership with the community.

Arden will be home to a diverse mix of housing, including social and affordable homes, as well as commercial and innovative spaces that support jobs of the future. With a target of 34,000 jobs and 20,000 residents, this is a bold vision that puts climate resilience, transport connectivity and community infrastructure at its core. It is particularly exciting to see health, education and research positioned as key industries in the precinct. The location is already adjacent to the world-renowned Parkville medical precinct, and Arden will expand this reputation, becoming a hub for collaboration, discovery and innovation. New open spaces, tree-lined streets and a new station as part of the Metro Tunnel will help make the precinct accessible and welcoming for everyone, from workers and residents to visitors and students. This is exactly the kind of forward-looking and people-first development that growing cities like Melbourne need. Just as importantly, the proposed new school in the precinct is being designed to serve families from the outset and ensure that the area grows as a place where people can live, learn and work locally.

The action I seek is for the minister to join me on a tour of the Arden precinct. I would welcome the opportunity to walk through the site with the minister and see firsthand the progress being made and the potential that lies ahead. Arden gives us an opportunity to build our neighbourhood from the



ground up with the community in mind, and I know the Allan Labor government is committed to ensuring that it becomes a neighbourhood that Melbourne and Melburnians can be proud of.

### Education system

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:46): (1757) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with me to discuss measures that can be taken to address Victoria's education crisis. Our so-called Education State has lost its reputation for effective, appropriate education under Ben Carroll and the Allan Labor government. I am determined to see this turn around, and the most important step we can take is to set high expectations for students, teachers and schools.

The first recommendation of the inquiry into Victoria's education system is setting a long-term goal for 90 per cent of students to achieve proficiency in reading and numeracy. This means hitting or exceeding bands across years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Disgracefully, the minister flatly refuses to commit to this, and adjustments to NAPLAN testing make it difficult to do annual performance comparisons. Then there is the VCE exam fiasco which forced an independent review, which found no board-level oversight over exam paper production, weak risk management, poor project delivery, inconsistent compliance, ineffective change management and not a shred of crisis planning – not a shred. In years past a minister would have resigned or got sacked. This is called ministerial responsibility. Clearly, the Premier cannot afford to put this minister offside by demoting him. After all, he is slowly building the numbers in her party room.

On staffing, the teacher shortage is getting worse. Stakeholders tell us previous EBAs have favoured conditions over pay. But what does this mean to Victorian teachers? They are the worst paid in the country in Victoria, while the number of available teachers is becoming fewer and there is an increase in casual relief teachers rather than permanent teachers. Many Catholic and independent schools cannot match government pay and are dealing with the outrageous school tax, a tax which the Liberals will scrap. Then there is bloated compliance and inconsistent rules, outdated IT and burdensome bureaucracy that are taking up teachers' precious time, not to mention a number of schools with old classrooms and even portables. And if that were not enough, the minister quietly slashed \$2.4 billion from public schools. It is so disastrous in this state that even relief teachers in my area have been asked to bring their own supplies, including paper, to the school for the students because the school does not have enough. The promise to fully fund schools has been kicked out to 2031, leaving Victoria dead last in its funding per student, as confirmed in the recent state budget. This is the cost of 10 years of Labor's waste, mismanagement and spin. Only a Battin-led Liberal government will clean up the mess and restore pride – *(Time expired)*

### Begging

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:49): (1758) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action that I seek is for Victoria to stop criminalising begging. Jessica Geddes of Endeavour Hills was only 27 years old when she was fatally bashed by her abusive partner in 2020. Thirty-six reports were made to Victoria Police of Jessica breaching the public order. She often begged for food and money while her Centrelink payments were directed to her abusive partner. When police did make contact, they would usually ask Jessica to move on, despite receiving reports of suspected family violence. State Coroner John Cain said:

It appears that each incident was considered individually, rather than considering the reasons why Jessica was begging, and the underlying issues she was facing ...

Like State Coroner John Cain, I believe we need to end the criminalisation of begging in Victoria. Being poor is not a crime. Our archaic laws are built on negative stereotypes of beggars as troublesome or lazy. Despite being decriminalised in Western Australia, New South Wales, the ACT and Tasmania, begging remains an offence in Victoria punishable by fine or imprisonment. According to Justice Connect Homeless Law's 2018 survey, one in three people charged with begging had experienced

family violence. That same survey found 77 per cent experienced homelessness, 87 per cent had a mental illness and 37 per cent reported childhood trauma or abuse.

Criminal responses to begging perpetuate poverty and fail to address root causes of vulnerability that lead people to beg. We are currently locking up people for simply trying to survive, and if we do not lock them up, we fine them. It is a terrible irony that in Victoria if you cannot afford to survive and are forced to resort to begging, the government fines you, pushing you further into poverty.

For those that are charged, having to attend court amongst poverty, homelessness, violence and mental illness is a mammoth task. When someone fails to attend court, they can be subject to further criminalisation. We must end the criminalisation of begging in Victoria. We owe it to people like Jessica and to those who, instead of being offered a helping hand, were told to move along. So I ask: will the Attorney-General take steps to stop the criminalisation of begging in Victoria?

### Major events

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:52): (1759) We on this side know that Victoria is the best state in Australia and indeed we are the sports capital of Australia. Growing up it did not matter whether it was the State of Origin, the footy, the Sheffield Shield, even *It's a Knockout* – you get behind the big V, you get behind the blue and you absolutely get around it. Whether it is the AFL Grand Final, indeed finals or even home and away, the crowds we turn out week in, week out are absolutely setting the standard worldwide. We are going to thrash the English in the cricket this summer no doubt with the Ashes. Whether it is the tennis, the grand prix, the gridiron that is coming, the ice hockey I got to when it came out – that was fantastic. President, fashion week – I am sure that you keep a close eye on that. While the Liberals talk down Victoria, the Labor Party celebrate everything we achieve together. We get behind Victoria, we absolutely love all that it is. My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and the action I seek is an update on how the Allan Labor government is supporting Victoria's major events calendar to grow and grow our visitor economy so that we keep thriving and we keep doing better. If the minister has time, he can also give me a tip on how much he thinks Collingwood will win the grand final by.

### Suicide prevention

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:53): (1760) One of the issues that affects not only my electorate of Ringwood but also every electorate and far too many of our citizens, young and old, is mental health. It is appropriate tonight with the minister in the chamber that my matter relates to mental health. It is perhaps appropriate also that from time to time I have given the minister a hard time, one might say, in respect to some matters mental health related. Tonight that is not my intention. Tonight my intention is to celebrate the recent announcement – as the minister referred to in question time today – in respect to a mental health local in Maroondah. So it would be no surprise to the minister that what I would ask of the minister is an explanation or elaboration on the planning and the process now in place in Maroondah. It is critical. It is in fact something that I have had an opportunity just recently to speak to the CEO of Eastern Health in respect to. The day after the announcement came, he and I were both talking about the importance of ensuring that Eastern Health are part of that conversation but also part of the process and part of the selection process for the running of this mental health local.

This is a matter that is not only dear to my heart but obviously dear to the heart of many locals. It is a matter that reverberates right throughout our community. It was first, perhaps most notably, brought to my attention not only in terms of the services locals seek but because of a mother called Bree and her son. Unfortunately, Patryk took his own life aged 17. He took his life on 10 February 2023. Likewise, perhaps many in this place are familiar with the case of Mac, as he is referred to commonly – Mackenzie Holdsworth – the son of an extraordinary individual in his father. Mac took his life on 24 October 2023. Many in this place right across the political divides have worked with his father, Wayne Holdsworth, who has committed his life to making sure that no parent should have to live through the tragedy of their own son or daughter or loved one, no matter their age, taking their own life.

I am very excited by the prospect that we may have more services locally in the Maroondah area that service not only Ringwood, Ringwood East, Nunawading, Mitcham, Blackburn but right across the eastern suburbs. It is a welcome development. I welcome it. I look forward to understanding when these services will take shape and form and begin to service the local community. There is no doubt that you can continue to throw money at this problem, but until we get people who can actually connect with humans and work through their mental health difficulties, then we are not going to address the problem. It is not going away, and it is becoming larger. On that note, I would invite the minister to share with this house as much as she can in respect of that development. I welcome that.

### Gendered violence

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:56): (1761) I rise to direct an adjournment matter to the Attorney-General. The action I seek is for the government to provide a timeline for a response to the Australian Law Reform Commission's final report *Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice Responses to Sexual Violence*, released in January 2025. This comprehensive national report followed years of advocacy from survivors, experts and legal professionals and calls for systemic reform of how our justice system responds to sexual violence. Too often the current system leaves survivors feeling alone, invisible and as if they are the ones on trial. This final report has 64 comprehensive recommendations, and the majority of the recommendations specifically require action from each state and territory government. The ALRC's work was commissioned by the Commonwealth but engaged closely with state and territory justice systems, including Victoria's, which hold responsibility for criminal law and court procedure. Many of the recommendations therefore depend on state implementation.

Key proposals include but are not limited to the following: establishing safe, informed, supported entry points for victim-survivors, including frontline trauma-informed sexual assault service providers connected to legal advice; ensuring earlier legal assistance for complainants, including access to independent legal advice before giving evidence; increased use of prerecorded evidence and ensuring flexible options for how victim-survivors appear in court; embedding trauma-informed expert testimony to address myths and misconceptions and improve jury directions and judicial training accordingly; and exploring restorative justice pathways for survivors post investigation, discontinuation, plea or sentencing.

This report is a landmark opportunity to restore faith in the system and centre the experience of those most harmed by it. The government has not yet indicated when it will respond to the ALRC's final recommendations and invest in the specialist sexual assault and legal services that are needed. My Greens colleagues and I have had a number of constituents contact us, keen for these important reforms to be accepted and implemented in Victoria. Attorney, I ask that you provide a timeline for when the government will respond to the state-based recommendations in the ALRC's *Safe, Informed, Supported* report and whether it intends to act on its recommendations in full.

### Armenian community

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:58): (1762) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning in the other place. The Allan Labor government is supporting St Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Surrey Hills, including with a \$133,000 funding grant. The Armenian community is an important contributor to my community in the Southern Metro. The action I seek is: could the minister please provide information on how the Allan Labor government is best able to support the Armenian community to grow and thrive?

### Family violence

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:59): (1763) Tonight I rise on behalf of women and children in Victoria who have been placed in danger not by chance but by the choice of the Allan Labor government – a choice this government has made to cut more than \$200 million from domestic violence prevention and housing support. That figure is not just a line in a budget. It is the difference

between a mother sleeping safely in a refuge centre or trembling in fear inside a motel room. It is the difference between a child having a fresh start and rebuilding their life or returning to an abuser. The Premier tells this Parliament she stands with victim-survivors, but her government has delayed critical crisis housing projects and defunded an Aboriginal refuge centre in the Wimmera. Meanwhile Safe Steps has been left without the resource it needs to open 28 high-security crisis shelters – shelters that are already built and ready to protect almost 1000 women and children every single year. Instead victim-survivors are being warehoused in short-stay motels, where 93 per cent of critical incidents now occur. They have been turned away from services that were once their lifeline. If the Premier truly stands with Victorian women, she must fund the services that stand in the gap. The action that I seek is that the minister urgently restores the \$200 million cut from domestic violence programs and housing supports and recommits to delivering the refuge redevelopments and crisis accommodation this government promised and then abandoned.

### WorkCover

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:01): (1764) My adjournment today is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the action that I seek is that he meet with some of the injured workers that I have recently met with to hear their experiences and better understand how difficult their dealings with WorkCover have really been.

Jesse has asked me to share his story, so here it goes. Jesse was a committed health and safety representative when a forklift crushed his body at work. The physical injury was devastating, but what has truly destroyed him is the way the WorkCover system has handled his claim. In August 2024 the agent managing Jesse's claim provided false and misleading information to the medical panel to block approval of the surgery he desperately needed. Since then his medical treatment has been repeatedly denied or delayed, prolonging his pain. In June 2025 a whole-person impairment assessment was brought forward, not to finalise his claim but to determine ongoing entitlements. Despite clear medical evidence showing his condition had worsened, the agent again relied on inaccurate information to terminate weekly payments. This led to Jesse receiving a premature and unjust 16 per cent WPI rating. Because of this flawed rating Jesse's weekly payments have been cut off even though his condition continues to deteriorate. Meanwhile an investigation into the agent's misconduct has dragged on for over nine months with no resolution, leaving Jesse trapped in financial and medical limbo.

Jesse's body was broken at work, but it is the system that is breaking his future. The bureaucratic machinery has erased his dignity, ignoring the ongoing impact of his injury and the hope he once had for a meaningful recovery. Every step of the process has retraumatised him, turning what should be a path to healing into a battle for survival. Instead of receiving the support he earned through his work and sacrifice, Jesse faces a system that treats him as a liability to be discarded. His story is a stark reminder that the greatest injury for many workers is not the accident itself but the crushing weight of an uncaring compensation system that abandons people in their time of greatest need. Surely we can work for better.

### Pick My Park program

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (19:03): (1765) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. The action that I seek from the minister is an update on the Allan Labor government's Pick My Park program. The inner south-eastern suburbs in the Southern Metropolitan Region are home to some of Melbourne's great parks and open spaces, and with more and more people wanting to call this part of Melbourne home, parks are going to be an increasingly important part of the amenity of these local communities and of these public open spaces. The government's Pick My Park scheme is providing funding of between \$20,000 and \$250,000 for new and upgraded parks. It is a great opportunity for residents across the Southern Metropolitan Region to put in applications to get behind their parks and to make our wonderful communities even better.

### Planning policy

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:04): (1766) The action I seek is from the Minister for Planning. I rise to speak about a completely unaccountable planning process, one that is almost certain to deliver bad local urban design outcomes and shuts out communities. It is a broken process that is not fit for purpose. What we are seeing now is planning by ministerial diktat. Local knowledge and community voices are being sidelined in favour of blunt instruments and centralised control. If you need any proof of how flawed this approach has become, you need to look no further than Greensborough.

Greensborough is a peaceful and tight-knit community in Melbourne's north-east. For decades it has stood as a model of sensible, sustainable suburban development – quarter-acre blocks, good schools and passable public transport but a very strong sense of identity. It is not glamorous, but it works, and it works because of good planning carried out over time with care and consultation. But all that is now under threat. Through sweeping planning powers the minister has decreed that Greensborough must change without consultation, without consent and without regard for the residents who call it home or the 2500 signatures I have now accumulated on a petition against it. It is a top-down approach that shows a complete lack of respect for the people who have invested in this community. As the local member, I have spent time in Greensborough. I have listened to locals and understand the challenges they face, especially around housing affordability. They know there is a need for more social housing, but they also know that if we get the planning wrong, it will end up compounding disadvantage, not addressing it.

We have been here before. High-rise social housing developments in the 1960s and 70s taught us that simply stacking people into towers without adequate support services, mobility options or open space leads to poor social outcomes. We should not be repeating these mistakes under the banner of progress. When you add insult to injury by removing car parks, you make it even harder for residents to access work, education and community life, and when you approve apartments that are smaller than regulation size, you are creating the perfect conditions for bad social outcomes.

Greensborough is not the CBD; it was never planned to be. The absurdity of applying inner-city planning models to suburban communities is obvious to anyone willing to listen. The action I seek is for the minister to immediately pause the process of building a 17-storey tower in Greensborough and genuinely engage with the local community. Planning should be done with people, not to them. We need a planning system that respects place, empowers communities and delivers good outcomes, not one that bulldozes its way through longstanding neighbourhoods with the pretence of reform.

### Gender services

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:07): (1767) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health in the other place. When a person decides to attempt to change their gender, it is a life-changing decision. As a libertarian I believe that people own their own bodies, and I support the right of adults to make these decisions for themselves. However, I also believe that parents should be in charge of their children. There are many decisions children cannot make without endangering their safety. Nobody knows their children's needs better than parents, and nobody cares for them more. This is why the new regime in Victorian schools, where they can sometimes automatically affirm the stated gender of children without the knowledge of their parents, is a disastrous precedent. It forces teachers to keep secrets and puts kids in a school-to-clinic pipeline. This can and does lead to infertility. It affects brain and bone development and turns young people into medical patients for the rest of their lives. Nobody should allow this without very, very good evidence about the benefits.

To that end, I direct the minister to the results of an application by the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons to put several items for gender-affirming surgery for adults on the Medicare benefits schedule. The results were released last week by the Medical Services Advisory Committee, and I encourage the minister to read this report. In summary, their assessment is that evidence in favour of the benefits of surgery is severely lacking. It reported that procedures like phalloplasty have medical

complications such as infections, fistula and partial loss in 30 to 40 per cent of cases and surgical revision rates of up to 45 per cent of the cases. The rate of complications associated with vaginoplasty was 11 to 32 per cent, and the most commonly occurring major complications were infection, sepsis, pneumonia and rectal or urethral injuries. The evidence presented to MSAC about nearly every aspect of the benefits of surgery, including the impacts on self-harm, could not be assessed because of the poor quality of these studies. The main cause of this was attrition bias and subjective outcome measures. People who had bad outcomes had simply been ignored.

MSAC also noted that the relevant studies were excluded. This is the evidence that the Victorian government relies on for their gender policies in schools. These damning findings echo the findings of the Cass review, which found major problems with clinical appraisals from the Royal Hospital for Children, and criticisms from a court case more recently by Justice Strum. My request for action is for the minister to read the summary of findings from the Medical Services Advisory Committee, application number 1754.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:10): (1768) My adjournment this evening is for Minister Shing, the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The Suburban Rail Loop will significantly reduce travel times, improve access to education and medical precincts, create thousands of jobs and enhance livability and amenity. The action I seek is for the minister to update me on the progress of this project and the benefits that it will bring to constituents in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

### Western Highway duplication

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (19:11): (1769) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It concerns the Western Highway, particularly near Buangor, halfway between Ararat and Beaufort. On 5 July an incident occurred at Buangor on the unduplicated section, where a car veered into another, resulting in a fatality. On 18 July, a car and a truck collided on the Western Highway again, near Warwick, not far from Buangor on the Ararat side, again on the unduplicated part of the Western Highway.

Any time a fatality occurs on our roads, the loss of life is a tragedy. They are loved members of families, contributors to communities, employees and volunteers in country communities gone and sadly taken. For years this stretch of road was supposed to be duplicated. I was in my early 20s when the duplication of the Western Highway started – under a Liberal government, mind you – but the political willpower to continue this important duplication and associated safety upgrades appears to have been lost.

I do not doubt those in the government would see this tragic loss of life as exactly that – tragic. That is not in question. But when government projects stall and the safety upgrades associated with those upgrades stall, there is going to be an impact. Even the member for Ripon, who is a great source of content, has slammed her own government for a lack of action. In a letter to the minister, which she shared publicly, she said:

This stretch of road is considered one of the most dangerous in Australia, with three lives lost between Buangor and Ararat this year ...

The frequency of fatal collisions is having a profound impact on our emergency services, as well as the Ararat community more broadly.

...

We must do all we can to improve road safety between Buangor and Ararat, so that no more lives are lost.

Need we remind anyone that this is a government MP writing to her own minister, highlighting inaction from the government? Don't you think she should just turn around in the party room and say, 'Minister, come and have a look. We've got a real big issue'? No, she had to write a big letter and

point it out to everyone. What was the result? Nothing actually changed. It is PR spin wrapped up and packaged as though the government is actually doing something. I even had a bus driver on the phone to me today saying that there was nothing going on and they were concerned.

The action that I seek from the minister is simple: fix the Western Highway, stop making excuses, stop the rubbish PR games, start putting shovels in the ground, get the graders out – do your job and duplicate the Western highway as was promised.

### Responses

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:13): There were 20 adjournment matters this evening to 13 separate ministers, and we will seek written responses in accordance with the standing orders.

Just in relation to Mr McGowan's matter about important issues around mental health services in his North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, I did want to make a few brief comments about that and acquit that matter for Mr McGowan. I do want to acknowledge the many amazing people in his community who work tirelessly to support people with mental health challenges in the community. I want to acknowledge all of the amazing mental health services and the workforce in that region. It is certainly something that I am particularly focused on in terms of rolling out additional services, and I talked a little bit about that today in my ministers statement. I was proud that the 2025–26 state budget included \$34.4 million to not only continue to support the 15 locals we already have across 17 locations but to roll out seven new services, one of which will be in the City of Maroondah. There is planning work that is underway through my department currently. Once we have confirmed through those commissioning processes the provider that will run the service in that particular LGA, we will be able to say more about when the service will be operating. But I am very hopeful that those seven new locals will be up and running later this year.

I do want to just reiterate how important it is to support a strong pipeline of workers for our mental health locals. We want to make sure that we are not pinching mental health workers from other parts of the system but that we are actually building an additional pipeline of workers. Yesterday's announcement – which is part of our \$15.8 million graduate program for our locals – was great because it is another opportunity to build that pipeline. Once we have the three rounds of that graduate program up and running, that will be approximately 100 new specialist mental health workers to add to the fabulous people we already have working in our locals.

I also just want to acknowledge that the federal government is doing some important work and investment in this area, which will complement what we are doing here in Victoria. I think in the north-east metro region we are seeing significant increases in services, including the Lilydale and Whittlesea locals. We also have the Box Hill hub, which continues to operate, and the Box Hill Head to Health clinic, which the Commonwealth will upgrade – as was announced during the federal election campaign – to a Medicare mental health centre. We also have the Heidelberg West Head to Health clinic and the Greensborough hub. This is all really important because it means that we are building a strong network of services, many of which work very closely together. I am very happy to, whenever I can, Mr McGowan, update you on the progress of particularly the Maroondah LGA local service, which we will be standing up later this year.

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

**House adjourned 7:17 pm.**