

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Thursday 31 July 2025**



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**Thursday 31 July 2025**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Matt Fregon) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Petitions*

**Road maintenance**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) presented a petition bearing 552 signatures:

This Petition of residents from across Victoria draws to the attention of the House their concerns regarding the appalling state of our roads.

The petitioners therefore request that the Labor Government provide more funding and maintenance to fix our roads.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

*Documents*

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust – Report year ended 31 March 2025

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Country Fire Authority Act 1958* – SR 72

*Worker Screening Act 2020* – SR 71

*Wrongs Act 1958* – Notice of scale of fees and costs for referrals of medical questions to medical panels under Part VBA (*Gazette G26, 26 June 2025*).

**DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS** – The Clerk tabled:

Government response to the Environment and Planning Standing Committee's Report on the Inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply.

*Committees*

**Privileges Committee**

*Membership*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That Richard Riordan be a member of the Privileges Committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions*

**Motions by leave**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the government for moving a motion on antisemitism but refusing to debate it at the next opportunity, which would be this morning.

**Leave refused.**

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I was going to say this at the start of question time today, but I will say it now: interjections are disorderly, and yesterday's behaviour was a shambles in question

time. Today will have to be better, and if it requires me ejecting every member of this house, that is what will happen. We should be better.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:36): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 12 August 2025.

#### **Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **National Tree Day**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): I rise to celebrate an event I attended last Sunday as part of National Tree Day in my community in Aberfeldie at Afton Street reserve. The More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West program aims to increase tree cover in Melbourne's western suburbs and make sure my community benefits from all of the important initiatives that we know a cooler, greener, healthier climate can provide for our local communities. We have already delivered 435,000 new trees across Melbourne's western suburbs, and we are on track to deliver 500,000 by 2026. These trees will provide much-needed shade, support biodiversity, improve air quality and make our open space even more welcoming for generations to come. I thank the Friends of Steele Creek and Moonee Valley Sustainability. I thank everyone that came out to brave the cold.

#### **NAPLAN results**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:38): I also rise to say to anyone who says the fight is not worth it, that politics cannot make a difference, that all parties are the same: look at this week's NAPLAN results for education. These are no accident. These results are a collective effort, a sustained effort by our Labor government from 2014. On this side of the chamber we do not believe that postcode determines destiny. We do not think education is just a nice thing to do. We see education as the single most important public investment in our future, and these results show why we are the Education State.

#### **Member conduct**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (09:39): I was going to stand up and talk on crime, but I just want to say something in the house today and address something that the Deputy Premier actually just said. We may not all agree and not all parties are the same in this place, but we all come in here to try and do the right thing by Victorians and make a difference and for the right purpose. Some of the stuff that has happened this week in my opinion is out of line, and I think that we can all agree that we all have ideas about what Victoria wants and needs, but I would hope that we are all here to make the lives of all Victorian families and all Victorians better, including our own.

#### **South Morang Football Netball Club**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:39): I am pleased to speak about the South Morang Football Netball Club, an outstanding local sports club in my electorate. With more than 700 members, the club continues to grow, particularly amongst its women's teams. Recently they hosted a fantastic Ladies Day event which I attended, celebrating the contributions of women within the club and the broader community. The event featured Bernadene Voss, the CEO of Big Group Hug, as the special guest speaker. She shared the inspiring work her organisation does to support local families in need. Also in attendance were Jennifer Phefley, Northern Football Netball League general manager of

football operations, Lauren Theodosios, Northern Football Netball League general manager of netball operations and Shanae Watson, a local contestant from *The Voice*. The club raised \$2000 to support junior girls and senior women's development and collected hundreds of donated items for Big Group Hug to assist young girls and women in need. I want to especially thank Jill Taylor,

[NAME/S AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Marianne Grillo, Vanessa Nativo, Maxine Jolly and Stephanie Lancefield, just a few of the many incredible organisers and volunteers who made the day such a success. Looking ahead, the club will benefit from recent investments by the Allan Labor government, including \$150,000 to upgrade kitchen facilities and \$250,000 matched by the City of Whittlesea for lighting upgrades at the west oval at Mill Park Lakes Recreation Reserve. Every year, the club becomes more inclusive and welcoming.

### Firewood collection

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (09:41): Firewood is not a luxury for the people of my electorate; it is essential for heating, particularly with the soaring costs of electricity and gas. Last year the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action were clearing flood debris from the Barmah forest and were planning to burn 70 huge piles of wood to get rid of it. After lobbying by me and a number of others, common sense prevailed and that firewood was made available to locals to come and collect. I would urge DEECA again this year to actually look at where they could strategically pile up debris wood so it can be accessed by the locals for firewood. I am told DEECA was amazed at how orderly the people were who came and got it, how well they cleaned the area up and how well they behaved in collecting that firewood. As I said, I would urge them to do it again this year, but potentially extend it further downriver in my electorate, somewhere around Murrabit or Swan Hill so those people could also have access to it. What was amazing – I went along that day and was there – was the fact that there were elderly couples there collecting wood who did not have a chainsaw, who were getting the offcuts because they desperately needed firewood, and those with chainsaws actually went and helped them do it and helped them load their trailers up so they could take it home. The locals were outstanding in how they supported each other in making sure all that wood was put to good use to keep people warm in what is a very cold, long winter for those that do not have access to firewood. So please, government, do something similar again.

### Country Fire Authority Trentham brigade

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:42): Speaker, I rise to commend the remarkable courage and dedication of Trentham CFA volunteers, Captain David Wheeldon, Pat Sutton and Ethan Brown, who were recently awarded the distinguished unit citation for courage in recognition of their extraordinary actions during the terrible storm of June 2021, a storm that we will never forget. When violent winds exceeding 160 k's tore through central Victoria on that night of June 9, the Trentham community was left devastated: multiple roads were blocked, hundreds of trees were down and power and water supplies cut off. Amid these dangerous and chaotic conditions, David, Pat and Ethan received an urgent call for help from a woman who was stranded in critical need of oxygen. With roads impassable, they set out on foot, cutting their way through fallen trees and using their local knowledge to reach the woman via back roads and paddocks, delivering oxygen and along the way discovering several more people trapped in vehicles. They ensured the safety of a significant number of people, relocating them to shelter and providing essential supplies, all while working under falling trees and worsening weather. Their bravery and quick thinking saved lives on that night. I thank and honour David, Pat and Ethan and all first responders on that night for their extraordinary service. You are the heart of our community and the very definition of courage and community service.

**Romsey Primary School**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:44): Congratulations to Romsey Primary School, Melanie Stewart and her outstanding teachers on this year's NAPLAN results. What a treat to see Romsey kids on the front page of the *Herald Sun* yesterday.

**Paul van Gemert**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:44): I rise today to congratulate Senior Sergeant Paul van Gemert on his upcoming retirement after a very long and distinguished career of over 46 years in Victoria Police. Paul, along with his wife Andrea, who is also retiring from Victoria Police after nearly 40 years of service, will be the longest serving police couple with a combined total of 86-and-a-half years between them, an amazing achievement on many counts. Paul joined as a police cadet in February 1979 and has had the opportunity to contribute to the community in many ways over his career. He is the last remaining sworn member of the disbanded Victoria Police Military Band, which was the oldest continuous police band in the world. As the president of the police overseas service association, Paul has represented the many members of VicPol who have served overseas on peacekeeping or humanitarian missions with VicPol, the Australian Federal Police International Deployment Group or the ADF or who have otherwise served in the military.

Paul has also served overseas in Timor Leste and received many medals over the years of his distinguished service, including a National Emergency Medal for his significant contribution to protecting lives and property during the 2019–20 bushfires. This medal is in recognition of the dedication and courage shown during one of Victoria's most devastating bushfires. I have known Paul for many years through his time at the Mooroolbark police station, and I have enjoyed our professional and personal interactions over the years. I wish him and Andrea every happiness for a long and adventurous retirement, as well as congratulating them both. I would like to thank them sincerely for their service to the community.

**Lyn McKinnon**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:45): I rise today to honour Lyn McKinnon, a woman who has dedicated over 40 years of her life to serving our community through tireless volunteer work. Lyn has volunteered with Meals on Wheels, Diamond Valley Foodshare, 3081 Angels, the Country Women's Association and the Whittlesea pensioners association, as well as helping out other community organisations when there is a need. Lyn's meaningful work has directly and indirectly supported thousands of families doing it tough. Lyn works especially hard every Christmas. For 17 years she has helped pack and deliver over a hundred Christmas hampers for families not so fortunate, often taking on the heaviest lifting and the longest hours herself.

Humble, kind and endlessly generous, as described by those who know her, Lyn has never sought recognition or thanks. She simply shows up every year helping the community, as she firmly believes everybody deserves a fair go and a helping hand. Her empathy, compassion and reliability make Lyn a cornerstone of our local community. Thus it was fitting and much deserved that Lyn was recently honoured with the Banyule Lifetime Contribution volunteer award, recognising her outstanding lifetime of service to others. On behalf of my local community, I extend a heartfelt congratulations and thanks to Lyn for making our community a better place.

**Drought relief**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (09:46): I rise today to express my deep disappointment in the Allan Labor government's drought relief response. After two years of crippling dry conditions in south-west Victoria, the government's drought package is simply too little. The government seems to believe that setting up a taskforce and making some announcements will fix the problem. The round tables and meetings have produced no meaningful difference to farmers who have been suffering and



are suffering right now. We have no freight rebates like other regions and no consideration for hobby farmers. A discount on rates will be hitting farmers' mailboxes only now, and the emergency services is next year. We hear this week that CFA volunteers face a complicated process to claim the promised rebate for the emergency services tax: on top of their CFA verification, volunteers must register on a government portal, provide additional information and consent to data sharing with various parties. I mean, how much harder does it have to be? Recent rains have been welcomed, but feed for animals does not grow overnight. Feed is what farmers need now. The Victorian Farmers Federation has rightly called this package inadequate. Our farmers deserve real support, not delayed announcements and empty promises. Need for Feed is bringing trucks of hay from Western Australia as we speak. Government can get behind these practical actions if they truly want to make a difference. I urge the government to expand financial assistance. Our farmers feed Victoria, and they deserve better.

### Housing

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:48): Can I start by giving a shout-out to Danielle and Dhaani, two work experience students in my office who helped write my members statement this week.

Firstly, 96 new social homes will be built in Williamstown thanks to this government's continued commitment to and investment in social and affordable housing. The redevelopment of Bronte Court in Williamstown will see the site transform from 48 dwellings to 96 modern, energy-efficient homes for Victorians who need them most. Construction will begin next year, and community consultation will happen later this year.

### Ross Road upgrade

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:48): Secondly, the Allan Labor government is delivering cleaner air and safer roads for communities in Altona North with the completion of the sealing of Ross Road. This upgrade means less dust and more parking options for local families and visitors, including the Australian Islamic Centre and the Paisley Park precinct, home of Altona Magic and the Altona East Phoenix soccer club.

### Greg Dow

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (09:49): Finally, in sadder news, the Labor Party has lost a great stalwart with the recent passing of one of my branch members, Greg Dow. Greg had been a longstanding member of the Labor Party since his teenage years. He had a love of politics, policies and was a dedicated member and volunteer of the Labor movement and supporter of his local community. My condolences to Jason, Lisa, Kylie and their families. Vale, Greg Dow.

### Kokoda Track

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (09:49): I rise today to speak on Kokoda 2025. It was a real pleasure in the break to be able to take up to 30 kids across to PNG. Our half of the team flew into Kokoda, and we walked back to Owers Corner. Claire Lindsay was the winner of my Marsh/Tierney scholarship, the scholarship out of the seat of Morwell, where we take young 16-, 17- and 18-year-old children over to Kokoda. We walk the track some 140 kilometres, and they learn about the battles that took place. Each student is also given at the start a photo of a soldier from their region, and they carry that for the entire trek. We ended up at the Bomana War Cemetery, where the children – or the young adults as they are – got to sit in front of the actual graveside where the soldier was buried, and they were able to have a bit of a chat with them and thank them for their service. Also a big shout-out to the member for Gippsland East Tim Bull, who helps run and coordinate the trek. His knowledge certainly goes a long way to making the trip fantastic. A shout-out to the member for Murray Plains,

the member for Lowan and the member for Mildura, who also have scholarships. Well done to everyone that attended.

#### **Kealba landfill**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (09:51): I rise today to call on the EPA to explain their recent decision to withdraw criminal charges against Barro Group for their operations at Kealba landfill. As many would know, this is an issue that has been in the spotlight for many years now, since 2019. I do want to thank the EPA for their efforts during this period, but residents have been left shocked that the EPA this week withdrew criminal charges against the Barro Group. Under the Barro Group's operation the Kealba landfill has been burning, as I said, since 2019, and this has seriously impacted residents. I have made representations to the Minister for Environment and also the EPA.

I call on the EPA to consult with residents and have a public meeting, in particular with Kealba residents, to ensure that they understand the decision and the reasons and are also, importantly, given an update on this very, very important matter. My neighbours and I and the community deserve answers in relation to this very important issue. I will continue to strongly advocate for a conclusion to this issue, where we can have Kealba in a safe and appropriate manner for all our residents. They deserve nothing but an explanation and a conclusion to this ongoing issue, which has affected my residents since 2019.

#### **Kew electorate road safety**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (09:52): I wish to bring attention to a number of road safety issues in the electorate of Kew, which I have raised with the minister, but unfortunately my community has failed to see action. These include the Earl Street roundabout near Willsmere village, the pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Cotham and Glenferrie roads and the pedestrian crossing on Barkers Road near Methodist Ladies' College (MLC). First, at the Willsmere Road and Earl Street roundabout traffic volume continues to grow through the intersection, and the roundabout is adjacent to the popular Willsmere village and the Willsmere community gardens. However, the department has advised they do not propose to make any modifications to this site. I urge the minister to direct the department to install a pedestrian crossing along Earl Street, making sure that that roundabout is safe for pedestrians – for young people, for people with children, for the elderly. It is currently not safe.

The number 16 tram terminus is another safety issue, on the corner of Glenferrie and Cotham roads. This is a very busy intersection with many school students, residents and traders using it, and the tram stop is set back. Currently it is not safe, particularly for those school students to cross. The final issue I wish to raise is the pedestrian crossing on Barkers Road near MLC. This is where we see thousands of students crossing the road every single day ducking across Barkers Road – a very, very busy road – and we fail to see any action from the minister. To the government: please support my community and install these much-needed pedestrian crossings. And a quick shout-out to my mum, because it is her birthday today. Happy birthday, Mum.

#### **Heidelberg Golf Club**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:54): Congratulations to the Heidelberg Golf Club on the success of their 2025 pro-am event. With 220 entrants, it is one of the major events on the PGA schedule and the biggest golfing event within Banyule city. The event dates back to 1949 and is played in memory of Don Walker, who was a club professional in the 1930s and lost his life in World War II. Heidelberg Golf Club annually donates proceeds from the event to a different charity, and this year's event raised a phenomenal \$11,000 for Hayden's Helping Hands, which supports those experiencing homelessness by providing food supplies and connection. I acknowledge Lindsay Bell, general manager of Heidelberg Golf Club, and his team as well as club members and sponsors for their hard work in making this event such a success.

### Community health services

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:55): Congratulations to Holstep Health on the successful launch of the merger of Banyule Community Health with Merri Health. This merger is more than a change in name. It marks a renewed commitment to a holistic, community-led approach to care. I recently visited their site and saw firsthand the incredible dedication and passion of everybody involved. I commend the Holstep team and those who have previously worked at Merri Health and Banyule Community Health to bring this new chapter in community health to life. The launch coincides with 50 years of community health in Victoria, a milestone that reminds us of the Whitlam government's action to address the impacts of poverty, responding to local community needs and building inclusive communities. Holstep Health is in excellent hands with strong leaders like Tassia and Mick, who have deep ties to the communities they serve. I strongly believe that Holstep will make a meaningful and lasting benefit across our communities. Thank you to everyone at Holstep Health for your hard work supporting everyone.

### Victoria Day Awards

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (09:55): This statement celebrates the profound strength, kindness and resilience of volunteers within my local Rowville electorate community. On 1 July my colleague from the other place Nick McGowan and I had the privilege of co-hosting the annual 2025 Knox community Victoria Day Awards. We gathered to honour those who are truly the heartbeat of our community and highlight the often unseen efforts of our local heroes. These are the individuals who generously give up their time delivering meals, organising events, supporting clubs, caring for the vulnerable and simply lending a hand without seeking recognition.

While I do not have sufficient time to name each award winner individually, we are delighted to congratulate the remarkable group of winners representing their nominating organisations: Lysterfield junior footy club; Scoresby footy netball club; Rowville Netball Club; Knox Churches Soccer; Feed One, Feed All; the Rowville Lions Club; the Polish Association; Knox Chinese elderly citizens; Knox off-road remote-control car club; Share Space; the Polish seniors club; Rowville Cricket Club; Ferntree Gully Tennis Club; Knox Obedience; Sant Nirankari Mission; Rowville Men's Club; the Knox School; the Rotary Club of Rowville; the Rowville–Lysterfield Community News; and Karoo Primary School, where the principal Courtney is a committed Demons supporter. I wonder if she is still in that position after the flogging that they received last Sunday by the mighty Saints.

### Bentleigh Secondary College

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (09:57): I recently attended Bentleigh Secondary College's production of *Mamma Mia!* It was Absolutely amazing. Congratulations Leela Toth, Madison Bates, Scarlett Moss, Georgie Guengerich, Mia Workman, Tiana Bray, Lola Frost, Ella Slattery, Gabe Yianni, Luca Coombs, Will Hardy, George Kokakis, Kyril Andrenko, Cisco Biffin, Charlie Byrne, Emma Gates, Abigail Guengerich, Sophie Handley, Gal Harel, Lila Heppingstone, Shenaya Hettiarachchi, Tim Hill, Evie Hodges, Alexandra Maggioni, Matteo Maxwell, Eve McCausland, Lucille Miller, Jaya Mor, Benjamin Morgan, Sarah Murayama, Rosalinda O'Callahan, Missy Owens, Billy Rintoul, Megan Smith, Alana Wajnberg, Ruby Blundell, Evie Browne, Amelie Buxton-Rella, Izzy Butcher, Noah Clifford, Violet Cunningham, Lincoln Elford, Oscar Green, Benjamin Harris, Sahara Hurlstone-Del-Har, Mandy Lin, Ariel Young, Liliya Zhuravlyova and Zeb Graham, who was part of the production team.

What made this production even more Abba-solutely amazing is that it was the first major musical production held at Bentleigh Secondary College's brand new performing arts centre, a project of the Allan Labor government. Bentleigh Secondary College has a performing arts centre that, frankly, no other government school in the area has, and it is in recognition of the amazing performing arts program at that outstanding school. Congratulations to all involved.

### Homelessness Week

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (09:58): I rise today to speak about national Homelessness Week, which begins next week. It is a time to reflect on the urgent and growing need for real action to end homelessness in Australia. The theme for 2025 is 'Homelessness action now'. It is a clear and direct call to governments at all levels to stop delaying and start delivering. At the last census, 30,660 Victorians were without a home, almost a third of the national total. This includes children, young people, families and older women, people sleeping in their cars, on friends' couches or in unsafe, overcrowded or temporary accommodation. In a city and a state and a country as wealthy as ours, this should never be accepted as normal. Homelessness is not inevitable. It does not just happen. It is the direct result of political inaction and decades of policy failure, and the solution is no mystery: homelessness is fixed with homes. We need more social and affordable housing, and we need it now, not years down the track.

At 10 am this coming Tuesday I will be joining the Homeward Bound Walk at Ringwood Lake, hosted by Eastern Homelessness Network. It is an opportunity for the local community to come together, raise awareness and demand urgent action to end homelessness. I look forward to walking alongside many familiar faces in a powerful show of solidarity with those experiencing housing insecurity. To my colleagues in this place, housing ends homelessness. Stop the delay, stop the spin and start building.

### Ben Owen

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (10:00): I rise today to honour a remarkable local hero Ben Owen, who recently stepped down as unit controller of Emerald SES after more than 11 years at the helm of the busiest unit in Victoria over that time. Ben has been a cornerstone of emergency response in the Dandenong Ranges over his 21 years with the unit. As controller he oversaw more than 1500 emergency call-outs. His leadership has been defined by calmness under pressure, deep compassion and an unwavering commitment to keeping our community safe. His reputation for forging strong relationships with the CFA brigades and other emergency response agencies across the hills is unparalleled. He is there to serve the people when needed the most, from road accidents to trees down, flooding and the extremes of catastrophic storms, and he has mentored countless volunteers, helping to build a strong, skilled and compassionate SES team.

What makes Ben's story even more extraordinary is his resilience. During the catastrophic storms of June 2021 that hit the Dandenong Ranges, his own home was destroyed by a tree that carved its way through it. After racing home to assist his wife, daughters and pet dog to get out of the house, Ben returned to attending incidents across the hills. His selflessness is the essence of true community spirit.

Ben must also be credited with his passionate advocacy over several years for the building of the new Emerald SES unit, which is now approaching its fourth birthday. Though Ben has stepped back from the controller role, he remains an active volunteer, still answering the call when the pager sounds. He is Emerald's first life member, and I could not think of anyone more fitting to have been bestowed this honour. Deepest gratitude to you, Ben. Go Brisbane Lions!

### Youth Parliament

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:01): The 2025 Newhaven College Youth Parliament team are legislative influencers. Tilly Stetcher, Matilda Feehan, Miranda Zalunardo, Gabriel Di Falco, Nissa Campbell Walker and Jasmine Ruffin rose in the chamber to present and debate the Establishment of Community Gardens Initiatives Bill 2025 – its essence to promote accessible and sustainable gardens across the state – which was passed by a resounding 46 votes to two on the record. A congratulatory cheer to these super-smart, progressive, socially minded activists and to teammate Matilda who earned the Chamber Spirit Award. Young people excelling, bringing meaningful, positive change for the better – I too commend their bill to this house.

**Devon Meadows Junior Football Club**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (10:02): It was a delight to catch up with Devon Meadows Junior Football Club president extraordinaire Mel Alder. Would you believe, founded in 2019 with nine teams, the club now has 26 teams with 500 kids. Pauline Richards MP and I are proud sponsors and admire the passion, the welcoming and positive culture and the unbelievable hours that the committee, coaches, helpers and families all put in. This is one glorious family that wraps its arms around their community. This exemplar committee is one to model for sure. Thank you also to VP Joel Alder, Peter Nissen, Kelly Hughes, Bridget Talbot, Cassandra Tognazzini, coach coordinators Adam Carland and Kevin Derix and team manager coordinator Natalie Luckcraft. Go Panthers!

**Lara waste-to-energy facility**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (10:03): Once again I rise to speak to the house with a deep sense of urgency regarding the proposed Lara incinerator. Let me put this on the record: Lara is not the dumping ground for Melbourne's waste. For years now the Lara community has been fighting against the bit incinerator, and I am so proud to stand with them every step of the way. Since I was elected in November 2022 I have spoken to hundreds of residents about the Lara incinerator, and not one person supports it – not one.

This is not opposition for opposition's sake. We have serious and legitimate concerns about this project. This project is only 350 metres away from the nearest home. No family deserves to have a giant incinerator built over their back fence. The chimney will be 80 metres tall and dominate the beautiful skyline of Lara. This project has been shrouded in secrecy, and legitimate questions about the potential health and environmental impacts remain unanswered. This project has no social licence. Like I said, I have not spoken to a single local resident who supports this or thinks a big incinerator is a good idea for the Lara community. As members of Parliament, we must listen to the voices of those we represent. The Lara community and I stand united against this reckless proposal. Lara is not a dumping ground for Melbourne's waste, and I will keep standing up for Lara. I am so proud to be the member for Lara, and I am so proud to welcome members from Lara Secondary here today.

**Port Melbourne Secondary College**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (10:04): They say that up to 75 per cent of the jobs of the future will require STEM skills, which is why they are being prioritised in Victoria, the Education State. It was great to be able to see these skills in action at Port Melbourne Secondary College recently. Oh my goodness, 3D printing, robotics – it blows your mind. They are doing fantastic work there, and it is really embedded into the curriculum. I commend that whole school community on their dedication to the jobs of the future.

**Russell Griffiths**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (10:05): On another note – a sadder note – it is with deep sadness that I convey the recent passing of lifelong Labor stalwart Russell Griffiths. Russell was passionate about unionism, maritime pursuits, Port Melbourne and the Labor Party. He was a close friend of Perce White and was on the former Port Melbourne council with Perce from 1985 to 1991, where he served as mayor from 1990 to 91. Russell was always involved in the Port Melbourne community, loved watching the Borough at North Port Oval and maintained close connections with Bay Street locals. He was also a waterfront welcomer at Station Pier. His passion for ships led him to becoming a pioneer volunteer with the Seaworks Maritime Museum in Williamstown, and he was a long-serving member of the Victorian ship lovers association. He could recount impressive details pertaining to ships, associated dates and events. I recall visiting his home, where he invited me in to see his impressive array of maritime books. He was always friendly, loved to chat and was passionate about surmounting inequities with the justice system. He will be sorely missed by Albert Park Labor, by friends and by Port Melbourne.

### Emil Madsen Reserve, Mount Eliza

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (10:06): Firstly, I just want to get up today and acknowledge the great teams who were involved at Emil Madsen Reserve in Mount Eliza. They have had a water contamination issue over the last week, meaning that the Emil Madsen Reserve had to be temporarily closed, but the good news is that it will reopen this weekend. I will be there as well on Saturday morning. I will be there with my Chris Crewther water bottles, along with Amy Mitchell, who has generously donated water so people can ensure that they have water safely on the weekend. I do not have my water bottles here to show off – that would be a bit of a prop; I would probably get in trouble for that – but I do look forward to going out there with the Mt Eliza Junior Football Club and all those other sporting clubs there. It is the biggest participation sporting facility in the whole country at that venue, and it is such a great place. I have been advocating for a while for upgraded venues and facilities there. We look forward to the Mount Eliza Soccer Club having new facilities there, which will soon commence construction. I look forward to supporting those clubs into the future.

### Bills

#### Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:08): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medication Administration in Residential Aged Care) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

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

##### **Overview of the Bill**

The Bill builds on a broader suite of reforms by the Victorian Government that are aimed at improving the quality and safety of care for older people living in residential aged care. Specifically, the Bill aims to build on existing legislative requirements that require a registered nurse to manage the medication administration process for people living in residential aged care.

The main purposes of the Bill are to amend the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (the **Act**) to:

- further provide for the administration of drugs of dependence and Schedule 4, 8 and 9 poisons to persons accessing funded aged care services in residential aged care homes; and
- make consequential amendments, including those required following the repeal of the Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth) and the enactment of the Aged Care Act 2024 (Cth).

##### **Human rights issues**

The Bill is relevant to the right to life (section 9) and promotes the right to freedom from forced medical treatment (section 10(c)) and right to privacy (section 13(a)).

##### **Administration of medication in aged care services**

The Bill amends Division 10A of Part II of the Act, which regulates the management and administration of drugs of dependence and Schedule 4, 8 and 9 poisons in residential aged care. Specifically, clause 8(2)(c) of the Bill amends section 36E(1)(a), which requires registered providers to ensure that a registered nurse manages the administration of any drug of dependence or Schedule 4, 8 or 9 poison to persons receiving funded aged care services in a residential aged care home. The effect of this amendment is to expand the application of section 36E from aged care residents receiving a high level of care to all residents accessing funded aged care services in a residential aged care setting.

New section 36EA, which is inserted by clause 9, requires registered providers to ensure that any drug of dependence or Schedule 4, 8 or 9 poison supplied to persons accessing funded aged care services in the

residential aged care home, is administered by a registered nurse, an enrolled nurse who holds a specified qualification, or another registered health practitioner (eg, medical practitioner, pharmacist, dentist) who is authorised under the Act or regulations to do so.

This new requirement is subject to the conditions that the drug or poison has been supplied on prescription to that person who is on the premises of the residential care home when the drug or poison is administered to them. Non-compliance is subject to a criminal penalty. The effect of this amendment is to restrict who can lawfully administer medication in Victorian residential aged care homes to suitably qualified practitioners.

However, this provision is subject to limited exceptions: under new section 36EA(3), a registered provider does not contravene section 36EA(1) if:

- they have a reasonable excuse;
- a resident self-administers the drug or poison;
- person administers the drug or poison in accordance with circumstances prescribed in the Regulations.

### ***Right to life***

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and to not be arbitrarily deprived of life. The right to life is one of the most fundamental of all human rights. It is concerned with both the protection and preservation of life.

The right to life has not been examined by the courts in any detail in Victoria. Under international human rights law, the right to life includes an obligation on the State to refrain from conduct that results in the arbitrary deprivation of life, as well as a positive duty to introduce appropriate safeguards to minimise the risk of loss of life. This includes an obligation on the State to prevent arbitrary deprivation of life, particularly towards persons in vulnerable situations where threats to life are reasonably foreseeable. An ‘arbitrary’ deprivation of life may be described as one that is unreasonable or disproportionate.

The amendments introduced by this Bill are intended to build on existing obligations with respect to the management and administration of medications in residential aged care settings by restricting who can lawfully manage and administer medication to suitably qualified practitioners. A large number of people living in residential aged care have complex health needs which typically require intricate medication regimes. While medicines can treat conditions, control symptoms, and prevent disease, people with complex health needs taking a high number of medications are at an increased risk of adverse drug events. Further, the management and administration of drugs of dependence and Schedule 4, 8 and 9 poisons by unqualified persons can risk compromising health outcomes for aged care residents and lead to serious adverse health events.

The Bill mandates the safe and effective administration of certain prescribed medicines by appropriately qualified nurses and health practitioners. Registered nurses have the clinical skills to understand the therapeutic action of medicines and recognise adverse reactions and respond appropriately. Enrolled nurses also have clinical training and work under the supervision and delegation of a registered nurse. Clinical judgement is required when managing and administering medication and often involves assessing whether medicines should be administered or withheld. Accordingly, as the Bill aims to reduce adverse event-related morbidity and mortality for older people living in residential aged care, it can be characterised as promoting the right to life.

Given the inherent potential dangers of these drugs and poisons, this amendment may engage the right to life in relation to the adequacy of steps taken to safeguard against risks to life. The scheme is subject to strict regulatory controls that are reasonable and proportionate to the risks to human life posed by the amendments. First, the provisions will be subject to a range of regulatory requirements and sanctions relating to the management and administration of drugs of dependence and Schedule 4, 8 or 9 poisons, including:

- Stringent eligibility criteria in relation to the authorisation of enrolled nurses and other registered health practitioners, specifically:
  - Enrolled nurses are required to hold a qualification approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia in relation to the administration of medication (clause 9, new section 36E(2)(b)). This mandatory minimum requirement is aimed at facilitating high professional standards and ensuring that enrolled nurses have the knowledge and skills required to safely administer medication to the aged care residents;
  - Other registered health practitioners must be authorised by or under the Act or regulations to administer the drug or poison (clause 9, new section 36E(2)(c));
- Existing practice limits apply in relation to registered nurses and registered health practitioners who are subject to a condition, limitation or restriction prohibiting the obtaining, possession, use, sale or supply

of a drug of dependence or Schedule 4, 8 or 9 poison, where they will not to be authorised under the Act to use or supply the relevant poison. These restrictions protect against any risk of harm associated with the management and administration of drugs or poisons by practitioners who have been sanctioned by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia; and

- Offence provisions in relation to a failure to comply with the drug and poison management and administration (clauses 8 and 9, sections 36E(1) and 36EA(1)).

These safeguarding provisions are directed at reducing the incidence of harm, including death, from the administration of drugs of dependence or Schedules 4, 8 and 9 poisons. Accordingly, I conclude the Bill is compatible with the right to life.

Additionally, the administration requirements do not apply in respect of residents who self-administer their own medication (clause 9, new section 36EA(3)(b)). Further, these offence provisions do not apply to the residents themselves. As such, the Bill promotes the right not to be subjected to medical treatment without one's full, free and informed consent (section 10(c), and the right to bodily integrity, which protects against interference with a person's physical self by others without their consent (section 13(a)).

For these reasons, I consider the Bill to be compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter.

**The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas**  
**Leader of the House**

### *Second reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:09): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

The purpose of this Bill is to improve the quality and safety of care for older people living in Victorian residential aged care homes.

It will amend the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* so that only registered nurses, enrolled nurses with specified qualifications and other authorised registered health practitioners, administer drugs of dependence and Schedules 4, 8 and 9 medications to people in residential aged care for whom the medication has been supplied on prescription. This is a legislative change that will strengthen protocols around how medication is delivered to people living in Victoria's residential aged care homes. The Bill will also modernise language to reflect amendments made to Commonwealth legislation.

These changes reflect the Victorian Government's commitment to reduce the risk of medicine-related problems in residential aged care.

This Bill builds on existing state legislative requirements that aged care providers ensure that a registered nurse manages the medication administration process.

Older people are increasingly entering residential aged care later in life and with more complex health conditions that cannot be safely managed in their own home.

Complex care needs often means people have multiple medications. Based on Commonwealth data covering the period from July to September 2024, 36% of people living in Victorian residential aged care facilities are prescribed nine or more medications – which is the highest rate of polypharmacy in the country. Further, 19% receive antipsychotics which can carry particular risk if not managed appropriately.

Compared to older people living in the community, people living in residential aged care have complex health needs and intricate medication regimes that requires clinical skills when administering medication.

In 2020, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia estimated that 20% of unplanned hospital admissions from residential aged care are a result of inappropriate medicine use.

The 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety identified medication management and safety in residential aged care as an essential area for improvement, and highlighted incidents of inappropriate management of medication regimens, including medicines not being administered correctly or residents being given tablets without oversight to ensure they swallow them.

The Royal Commission's report also found that the routine care of older people in residential aged care often did not meet expectations.



Mandatory Care Minutes were introduced in response to the Royal Commission, to ensure that older people in aged care homes receive the dedicated care time they need. Since October 2023, providers have increased their staffing profile to meet targets – including 44 minutes of direct care by a Registered Nurse.

Commonwealth reforms to funding residential aged care and the implementation of the AN-ACC funding model has seen providers have greater certainty over their funding and more appropriate funding to meet the needs of their residents. This change has allowed for adequate staffing levels to provide quality care for residents.

This Bill helps ensure that older Victorians receive the best and highly skilled care from our registered and enrolled nurses in residential aged care.

This Bill will not remove a person's right to administer their own medication – if it is safe and they wish to do so. The Commonwealth Government has *Guiding Principles for medication management in residential aged care* which includes the importance of regular clinical assessment to determine a person's capacity to self-administer medicines safely and document their consent to do so.

This Bill will also not change how medication is administered in other settings, such as in someone's own home or in hospitals. This Bill will also not change how the Voluntary Assisted Dying scheme operates.

The Bill will not have any effect on the ability of registered health practitioners with existing authorisation under the DPSCA or Regulations to administer medication to residents, such as general practitioners, geriatricians, pharmacists or dentists.

Building on consultation undertaken in 2022 and 2024, we have consulted widely in the development of this Bill. This year alone more than 29% of the non-government sector has been consulted and contributed to the development of this Bill, and we have also worked closely with the Public Sector Residential Aged Care Services. We've consulted with peak bodies including Ageing Australia, the Victorian Healthcare Authority, and unions including, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and the Health Services Union; and the Commonwealth Government, including the regulatory bodies that oversee aged care.

I thank these valued stakeholders for their meaningful input into this reform.

This Bill incorporates what we have heard and learnt from our extensive consultation and engagement with the sector. We understand that it is common practice in most Victorian homes to have registered and enrolled nurses to administer Schedules 4, 8 and 9 medication to people for whom the medication has been supplied on prescription. We also recognise that in some residential aged care homes, there may be a need to shift away from having non-nursing staff, such as personal care workers, undertaking this responsibility.

We understand there may be unforeseen circumstances that impacts nursing availability – a serious resident emergency, temporary unexpected staff shortages at the commencement of a shift, or other factors impacting nursing availability to administer medication on time. For that reason, the Bill provides power to make regulations to prescribe exceptional circumstances where the obligation will not be breached. For example, this power may be used to specify circumstances where another person may administer prescribed medication if there is a risk to a resident from delayed or missed medication because of nursing availability. This is not intended to cover rosters with insufficient nurses, but rather unplanned situations that may occur from time to time.

Consistent with the broader Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act, the Health Regulator will adopt a risk-based and responsive approach to enforcement, with a priority focus on addressing significant harms from non-compliance, consistent with a public compliance and enforcement policy. Consistent with the Act, the Bill will provide for a criminal penalty of 100 penalty units for non-compliance with the new requirements without reasonable excuse. This criminal penalty will not apply in situations where a person self-administers or there is a prescribed circumstance.

We recognise that change may be difficult for some providers. And in addition to the commencement of this reform on 1 July 2026 - nearly 12 months away, the Victorian Government is committed to a 90-day grace period – a policy position where no enforcement action will be pursued until 29 September 2026 to give providers additional flexibility as they implement these changes.

In the 2025/26 budget, \$7.6 million over four years was allocated to support State Government funded services – the Public Sector Residential Aged Care Services – with implementation of the reform.

In addition, the Victorian Government has ongoing initiatives, incentives and policies to support and increase the nursing workforce, including in aged care:

A Diploma of Nursing is available under the Victorian Government's free TAFE initiative, which will increase the pipeline for additional enrolled nurses for government and non-government health and care sectors.

- The Making it Free to Study Nursing initiatives aiming to increase the public sector nursing workforce, including in Public Sector Residential Aged Care Services.
- The landmark 28.4% increase (over 4 years) to Nurses and Midwives' Enterprise Agreement 2024-2028 which is expected to assist with attracting and retaining nurses in the government sector.
- The Nurses and Midwives' Enterprise Agreement also enables and encourages diploma of nursing students to be employed in the public sector as Registered Undergraduate Students of Nursing (RUSONs - Bachelor students) and Registered Enrolled Nurse Students (RENS - Diploma students) whilst they complete their studies.
- \$95.1 million over four years was announced in the 2025/26 State Budget to support Victoria's health workforce through initiatives including registered undergraduate students of nursing, transitional support programs and capacity development for rural nurses.

The Department of Health will be supporting the sector with change management through sector communications and an opportunity for government and non-government providers to come together to exchange best practices in medication management, prior to the reform commencing.

To ensure these changes are working as intended, and that aged care providers are adequately supported, a five-year review will be undertaken by the Department of Health. This review will gauge the implementation of the reform against implementation objectives as proposed. From day one, the Department will also regularly engage with the broader sector through voluntary and anonymised surveys to gather insights and information on implications of the reform.

With this Bill, the Victorian Government will be the only jurisdiction to explicitly legislate that registered health practitioners can administer schedules 4, 8 and 9 medications to some of our most vulnerable people. It is part of the Government's commitment to ensure Victorians living in residential aged care homes receive the highest quality care and their medication from the most qualified workers.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:09): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 14 August.**

### **Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025**

#### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Colin Brooks:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**And Jess Wilson's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

- (1) addresses the potential financial impact on Victorian businesses, particularly small operators in rural and regional areas; and
- (2) provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in this bill.'

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (10:10): It is a pleasure to rise to talk on this bill, and I think this side of the house has shown a lot of enthusiasm for the substance of this bill and the spirit in which it has been developed. Just to remind everyone from where we were yesterday, because there has been an evening and we have had an evening out with all our colleagues. This Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 delivers on an election commitment to strengthen the Local Jobs First Act introduced in 2003, which feels a bit retro for me. It is really important that we continue to look at how the jobs market is evolving and how we can continue to meet those challenges. Some of the things that this bill will do include clarifying that suppliers are required to comply with commitments to local content and ensuring that

we hold them to account for making sure that at least 10 hours of labour hours of large projects are completed by apprentices, trainees or cadets, which is something that is particularly important, which I will turn to in just a moment. The bill also clarifies the commissioner's investigative powers, formalises their role in managing complaints and enhances the commissioner's ability to report on Local Jobs First issues to the responsible minister. This bill will also introduce a new power for the commissioner to conduct site inspections with three days notice to the person, which actually seems a bit generous, three days. Hopefully they can get their stuff together in three days before the commissioner comes knocking.

Our commitment to strengthening in this bill has consequences for noncompliance, where noncompliance will lead to being deprioritised for future government tenders, financial penalties or being required to fulfil local content commitments before receiving the final payment of the contract. The bill also introduces a new deprioritisation scheme. If someone does not deliver on the local content requirements as per the commitments in their development plan and cannot provide a satisfactory reason why, then the commissioner may deprioritise the supplier from future government work.

This is not a blacklist. It aims to disincentivise noncompliance with our development plans and provides agencies with information on poor past performance on Local Jobs First applicable projects. This is about, most of all, giving confidence to those people who are doing the right thing that those who bring down their good reputation are not going to get those jobs and the benefits of taxpayer money. This bill gives effect to this commitment by introducing explicit power under the act, allowing the responsible minister to set requirements to use a specified amount of locally produced uniforms and PPE on strategic projects as well.

As I am sure many of you know, I have come from the education sector, and ensuring that we have good local jobs is really important for those people who are working in the education sector, knowing that we have got somewhere for our kids to go into into the future. We know how important it is to create opportunities for young people across communities like my own in Werribee as they enter the workforce. In my previous life I was one of the work experience coordinators and I was in charge of vocational major, another great initiative from this Labor government to get more people into trades and apprenticeships rather than leaving school early. So from that experience I know that this government is building big for Victorians for today and for the future. We are transforming transport infrastructure connections and we are also investing in employment opportunities and our economy. In my time as a teacher and as an MP I have seen just how many young people in the west are benefiting from these opportunities that this bill helps reinforce, because the Big Build, the work that we are doing with our state government infrastructure, is a job creator. On my side of town the West Gate Tunnel Project alone has created 6000 jobs, and with the level crossing removal works across the west and our state more than 106 million hours have been worked on this program, and the number of jobs will likely increase to 6000 at peak construction.

We are committed to young Victorians, including the requirement that 10 per cent of labour hours on large projects be completed by apprentices, something I will refer to in just a moment with a bit of an anecdote. But we are helping not only the young workers of today but also those who have a little while left before they can expect to enter the workforce. In reflecting on this bill I want to take this opportunity to congratulate two really good friends of mine who on Monday welcomed the arrival of their second son. Baby Arthur and his big brother Oscar will one day have access to an enormous array of employment opportunities and the ability to utilise this transformative investment that our Allan Labor government is building today, and perhaps through the programs that build our roads, hospitals and schools Arthur and Oscar can learn and develop their skills for the jobs for the future, although with two teachers for parents they may end up in the family business. That is what this bill is about for so many – not just ensuring that when we build these projects they are Victorian but protecting the future of so many young Victorians. We can have confidence that it is through this bill and so many other pieces of legislation and initiatives introduced by this Labor government that we are supporting our future. That is why we are putting the protections in to ensure that these initiatives are supported

and clarifying those investigative powers of the commissioner to help further formalise their role in managing complaints. As well as this, as I have mentioned, we are enhancing that ability to report on Local Jobs First issues that may arise to the responsible minister to provide further protections. The further support for the commissioner in enforcing these regulations means that these initiatives will be able to both adapt and change with the unique circumstances at play across our state.

This bill is only part of a multifaceted approach of this Allan Labor government. We are committed to delivering for people across the state and ensuring that the millions of Victorians who are growing up all across our many communities are provided with the opportunity that they need to succeed. So many people across my electorate have worked hard for our state and have been part of the effort that has taken place across employment sectors. As a result those people who have benefited from our Big Build can enjoy a well-earned retirement or are able to find work with their enhanced skills on other projects, having earned a living from the skills and opportunities provided through protections of their employment from the state government through programs like this. To quickly list a few of these developments which have taken and are taking place within my community that my community benefits from, they include our Werribee Mercy Hospital emergency department upgrade; the M80 ring-road upgrade; the Western Treatment Plant capacity upgrade, which is extremely important for about 60 per cent of Melbourne and which flows down to Werribee – many people like to joke about that, but it is an incredibly important part of our state's infrastructure and quite often goes unrecognised; and the western suburbs road package, over \$1 billion of works that continue to this day across the Tarneit electorate, the Laverton electorate, the Point Cook electorate and my electorate. There are other projects, including our work at Cherry Creek, our new Wyndham law courts and our Werribee police complex, all built and guaranteed by our Local Jobs First policy. These are among the countless projects which have taken place or are taking place across Melbourne's west to the benefit of many in my community.

But it is not just about sourcing from Victorian businesses and supplying the actual building of these projects and the enormous positive impact that has. Unemployment in the western suburbs as a result of our Local Jobs First policies and the range of investments in the western suburbs is now lower than it was under the Liberal–National government all those years ago and, to be honest, under the Bracks–Brumby governments as well. We have seen a trend of unemployment falling across the western suburbs over these years. I know props are frowned upon, so I shall not show the graph that I have in front of me. But to describe it as if we are listening to a radio program, it starts up around 10 per cent in the retro 2000s, we see a spike between 2014 and 2018 of unemployment in the western suburbs and, despite a blip during COVID, we are seeing a continuing downward trend in unemployment across the western suburbs. That is according to the ABS.

While the polling is what some on the opposite side are staring at, I am laser focused on how we are reducing the unemployment rate in the western suburbs. I said I was going to turn to an anecdote, and I think it is important to end on this. During the by-election I met with apprentices from Werribee who are working on our Footscray and Werribee hospital upgrades. They have started and will end their training on these Victorian government sites that have been guaranteed by the laws that we are strengthening again today. I think it is pretty important to remember that when we invest, when we spend this money, it is not just about the figures that you see on your page or Standard & Poor's, it is about the lives that they help.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:20): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Yesterday the Premier came into this place and gave notice of an important motion on antisemitism. The history of this Parliament would tell you that the Premier would at the next available opportunity, which would be this morning, move her motion. I just saw the Premier wandering by in the corridor, so the Premier is here. Instead the government has moved to a bill for the third day in a row and has refused to allow the Premier time to debate her motion. I have never seen a Premier give notice of a

motion and not have it debated, ever. I do not think anyone can recall a time where the Premier would give notice of a motion, so-called, to stand against antisemitism. We know how hollow it is, because it is not being debated in this chamber. There will be a vote shortly. The vote will be whether this Parliament now deals with the Premier's motion, which stands against antisemitism. What will the government do? Will the government vote against the Premier's motion? Of course it will. How disgraceful that will be.

**John Lister** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Member for Werribee is warned.

**James NEWBURY:** This Parliament is now debating the same bill for a third day and has shelved the Premier's motion against antisemitism, and we know why. Guess how many speakers the government has on the Premier's motion – zero. They have not got one speakers list on the motion the Premier gave notice of yesterday – not one name.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Narre Warren North is not in her seat and is warned.

**James NEWBURY:** It does not surprise anybody. It would be the shortest list in history. How many government members are going to want to get up and speak on the Premier's motion? How could the Premier possibly make it worse in this state by giving notice of a motion and then shelving it? Had she not given notice at all, it would have probably been better, because now we all know that there is a notice of motion sitting on the notice paper and the Premier has been sidelined and has not had an opportunity to move her motion in this chamber. I suspect her party room has rolled her. That is the only possible explanation as to why a Premier, for the first time I suspect in history, has not moved a motion of such importance the day after putting it on the notice paper, because she has been rolled by her caucus. And the speakers list does not even exist.

**Luba Grigorovitch:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, that is a huge assumption. I would like a withdrawal, please.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order, member for Kororoit.

**James NEWBURY:** The member for Kororoit can speak next about her strong support of the motion. Never has a Premier brought a motion into this chamber, and I say this Parliament should be debating it rather than the same bill for a third day. That is what this government's now doing – it is the new trick – for a third day they are debating the same bill, and in this case it is to hide the Premier's motion against antisemitism. We on this side of the chamber heard the Premier give notice of her motion and thought of course it would be debated first up today. We stood ready, in a bipartisan way, to speak to it.

The Premier did not notify the rest of the Parliament that she was moving it, not that she had to, but if she was intending for it to be a bipartisan motion, it would have been courteous. But I will set that aside. We of course stood ready on this side of the chamber to speak to it, because what is happening on our streets is a disgrace, and our Parliament should be standing and speaking about those matters. We should be standing together in those matters. So to know that the Premier has been rolled and that this motion will not even be debated is a disgrace. As I said, I just saw the Premier in the corridor wandering by, so she is here. But what is not here today is that motion, and that tells you everything about the Labor Party's view on these issues. They are not willing to stand up and have it debated.

**Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:25):** Well, let us bring the mood down a little bit. We have just heard more assumptions than a conspiracy theorist at 3 am on Facebook. What an absolute joke. This is a motion catalysing an argument about whether people in this house think the Jewish community is important, essentially, and that they have important concerns. That is what I am getting out of this. That divisive rubbish should be shamed. To make the assumption that there is no speakers

list for this motion, to make the assumption that this is somehow irregular and this never happens in the house – the member opposite has made a bunch of assumptions, and the member is wrong on every single point. Well, it is typical.

No-one has said this motion has been shelved. No-one has said that we are not speaking to this motion, and that is the assumption that has been made across the aisle. I can only encourage those opposite to hold a mirror up to themselves, stop attacking each other, and maybe, just maybe, find some common ground, and listen to your community. But do not come in here and try and tell us that we do not stand with our communities, because that is what I get out of this motion. I get out of this motion the perception that this is about to be politicised, and this motion is all about that. This motion is not about a lack of a speaking list or the fact that the motion is not being spoken to, or that people on this side of the chamber should feel bad somehow for speaking to a bill which is about jobs in their community. No, this motion right here, brought to us by the member for Brighton, is all about politicising an issue and trying to paint the Premier as someone who does not care about a part of the community, because it is a shame. It is based on assumptions, and there are no facts.

The member for Brighton becomes very angry, and it is very performative, it is very theatrical, and I do appreciate that. I do love a good actor. But in this house, on this side of the chamber, we try and get serious business done, and we are used to that. That is how we operate. I will not stand up here today and have people on the opposite side of the chamber trying to politicise a very, very serious issue, and that politicisation is basically trying to make out, trying to paint a picture, that the government do not care about a certain cohort in the community, and that is wrong. It is wrong to politicise that. This motion is absolute rubbish and should be called out for what it is.

Motions should be based on a foundation of evidence. I could take a deep dive on this, and I still cannot find, even if I read *Hansard*, any evidence of what this motion is about. It is based on assumptions, and people should be more prepared when they come into this chamber to speak. If they want to raise a motion, it should not just be about a performative art, theatrics, about being angry about something or just finding something to be angry about. There is plenty to be angry about on that side of the house. You just need to look at each other and you are angry. You do not have to do things like this. The people in our community will see this motion for exactly what it is: it is performance art. It is better than *Home and Away*, I will admit. The acting is better than *Home and Away*.

**Gabrielle Williams** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** ‘Art’ might be a bit strong, Minister, but it is still performative art.

The only word I have not heard from the member for Brighton, which I do adore when he says it, is ‘craven’: ‘This is craven.’ I love it when he says that word, and we know he is getting stirred up and angry when he says that, but he has not at the moment, because he is not that emotional about this. This is theatrics. This is a play; this is drama, and it is no better than the Frankston High School year 8 drama class to me, and I think they do a better job. Therefore I cannot support this motion. I do not think anyone on this side of the house can support this motion.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** It is actually sad, member. I will leave my contribution there. There are other people that would like to make a contribution to this motion, but certainly interrupting the business of the house for this baseless set of assumptions should not be something that this government or this Parliament allow.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (10:30): It saddens me to have to get up here today and speak to the urgency of bringing on this motion at a time when literally only a minute ago I received a text to say that Melbourne Hebrew Congregation was defaced again for the fourth time overnight. We are seeing horrific attacks on the Jewish community on a daily basis, and there is a real urgency needed to show leadership.

On Tuesday, a few days ago, I stood up and I raised two notices of motion condemning those that targeted the National Gallery of Victoria simply because they have received donations from a Jewish donor – a horrific attack against a community, an antisemitic attack against a community, that needs to be called out. Both motions were denied. I then wrote to the Premier that evening, urgently seeking, in a bipartisan way, to have those motions debated, because a number of members of the community urgently sought me to have a debate that was done in a bipartisan way. I did not receive any communication back from the manager of government business or the Premier after requesting that urgent debate. I came in the next day to see that the Premier had moved her own motion, and even though they did not have the decency to reply to me in terms of my motion, I thought it was right that the Premier had raised a motion condemning antisemitism, and I thought it was a positive step in the right direction.

But unfortunately, coming in today prepared to debate this motion, again we see that there has been no action – all words and no action – and it saddens me that we are not standing here now debating this motion. I know that the Local Jobs First bill is really important, but as the member for Brighton said, we have had three days to talk about that motion. When the community are being hit with antisemitic attacks day in, day out, it is important for this chamber to show leadership. It is important for the Premier to stand up and debate her motion. This is a really important show of leadership for the Premier to, firstly, bring a motion into this chamber, but also to have the decency to debate the motion. It is really disappointing that the Premier is nowhere to be found on this motion, and it should not be the opposition again that have to drag the government kicking and screaming to debate their own motion, but if that is what it takes, then we will do it.

We should be able to reach over and hand in hand debate these things and support and call out the haters in Victoria. What we have seen in Victoria is nothing but hate, targeted attacks against a community – the most multicultural state in the nation for generations, and now all of that has been turned upside down because of a bunch of extremists targeting a community. Well, quite frankly, we have all had a gutful of that, and I think it is time that leadership is shown. It is a great opportunity for all of us to do it – not to attack one another, because I have got to say that most members of the government have come up and supported me during this time, and the member for Box Hill as well, and I want to thank those members that have done that and have called this out when it happens. But it is also important for us to call it out publicly here as well. It is a great opportunity for us to do that, and it saddens me that we are not doing it.

I do note an article that is on today's front page of the paper referring to a Labor hit list and the fact that there is discussion about watering down hate laws, protest laws and the special envoy to combat antisemitism. I hope that is not the reason why we are not debating this motion. I really hope it is not. But there is a real opportunity for the government to say, 'No, it's not that. The *Herald Sun* front page story isn't the reason why we're not debating this today – it's just been a bit of a faux pas from the government,' and for the Premier to come in here, bring in the motion and we debate it. Let us get on with it. Let us do it. Let us do this in a bipartisan way. Let us call out hate, as it is, and let us unite against it. If Chris Minns, the Labor Premier of New South Wales, can do that, we can do that here in the Victorian Parliament as well.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (10:35): I am actually very pleased that the member for Caulfield just spoke so intelligently and rationally, or at least a bit more calmly, because I am very angry. I am offended and I am upset. I have worked for two Jewish MPs, and I have a very strong connection to the Jewish community. The garbage that has come out of the mouths of some of the members on the other side is just insulting to many of us on this side of the chamber – not just to me but to many, including the Premier, and especially to the Gandel family, who I know and I know other members on this side of the chamber do as well. This is not what we are here for. To make the assumption and the insult that we do not care and that we will not debate it and that the Premier is walking around outside and she will not bring forward her motion – I am speechless. Of course we stand with the Jewish community, and the member for Caulfield knows that about me more than ever.

To say that because we have not got a list up we are not going to debate it – I am not sure when the opposition started running a list for the government or started sneaking past and looking at what list we had up. We have an agenda. We have some very strong bills to debate. We have a lot of members on this side that want to talk about jobs. That does not take away from how we feel about the Jewish community in Israel at all, and what is happening in synagogues and what is happening with the hostages stands very strongly with all of us. To make the assumption that it does not hurts and cuts very, very deeply to me and to my friends. For you to stand up there and say that we do not care is wrong. I do not need to stand up here and talk on a motion to know where we stand as a community and where we stand with our friends. For you to assume that –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Belinda WILSON:** For the member for Brighton to make those assumptions and characterisations about us on this side is offensive and upsetting – because every single day you make those comments every member of the Jewish community gets upset and hurt. We care. We make a difference. We do not grandstand in here and make stories up about things that we have done and said, because we do them quietly. We are not there doing a publicity statement, and the member for Caulfield does not do that either. He does it quietly as well. He does not get up here and grandstand. It is very offensive to say that we do not care, because we do. I can say to you that so many people on this side of the chamber, in fact probably over 90 per cent, have stood behind our member for Box Hill – sorry, 100 per cent, I should say, stood behind our member for Box Hill.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Brighton, you are on thin ice.

**John Lister** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Werribee, one more and you are gone.

**Belinda WILSON:** I corrected myself, thank you, member for Brighton. The 90 per cent I was talking about was about visiting a synagogue personally. It is probably over 90 per cent. But 100 per cent of us stand with our member for Box Hill, who has found this time very hard and very challenging, and we stand with him. We stand with the member for Caulfield and with his community. We do not stand with people that have garbage coming out of their mouths saying that we do not care and we do not make a stand. On that note, that is all I have got to say.

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (10:39): Yesterday the Premier gave notice of a motion about antisemitism, a motion that I think – or I hope – we all would support. But this motion has not yet been put up for debate today, and we have no indication of when or indeed if it will be put up today. But this is such an important motion to debate today and as soon as possible as what we have seen in Melbourne and what we have seen in Victoria, and in Australia and elsewhere, has been disgraceful, particularly with the growing attacks on our Jewish community, our long-term Jewish community at that, who have often been here for multiple generations.

More recently we had the protest against what is happening with Gandel, a well-known and generous philanthropist associated with the renaming of a hall at the National Gallery of Victoria. These protests against him were absolutely disgraceful. He is a well-known Jewish philanthropist who has supported so many things that are important to us here in Victoria. Being Jewish does not mean you are Israeli, and being Israeli does not mean you are Jewish. There are many people of Arab, Muslim and other backgrounds who are Israeli.

Our Jewish community needs to be protected. We have also seen attacks against our Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, which, as the member for Caulfield noted, was again defaced overnight. We saw attacks against the Adass Israel Synagogue, with a firebombing there on 6 December. We also saw the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation arson on 4 July. We saw the Miznon restaurant, a Jewish-owned restaurant, attacked on 4 July. And disgracefully, we saw Mount Scopus year 5 students



– year 5, so that is 10- and 11-year-olds; my daughter will be 10 this coming week – being taunted. They were taunted with words like, and I quote, ‘dirty Jews’ and other disgraceful terms. We should never have this in Victoria. We should never have these disgraceful attacks against our Jewish community, particularly innocent young people who are just trying to go about their lives, to be regular students, to learn and do everything else. You should never be targeted for your faith, your ethnicity or anything else.

We really do need to talk urgently about this motion. I commend the member for Caulfield, and I everyone here who would want to support this today, because it really should be debated. The member for Brighton made some very good points before in getting up with this procedural motion that this should be brought on as soon as possible. We saw 552 antisemitic attacks in 2024; I would not even want to know what they are in 2025 so far. I am sure we are beating, unfortunately, the 2024 record. That is not a record we want to beat. In 2024 that was a 52 per cent increase on 2023, and that was the most ever.

Our Jewish community – my colleague is a member of the Jewish community – and everyone should feel safe in Victoria. It should not matter your background in Victoria, it should not matter your view on the Israeli–Palestinian issue and the conflict at the moment. People can have differences of opinion on that conflict, but you should not be targeted for your faith, for your background, for what you believe in. Certainly people like Gandel, who have been such generous contributors to our state, should not be targeted. The National Gallery of Victoria have done the right thing in renaming the hall after him in recognition of his generous contributions over so many years.

I call upon this government to bring on this motion for debate as soon as possible. We all agree with the Premier’s motion that was given notice of yesterday, so I would hope that it is debated today – and not just debated today but debated as soon as possible. I definitely support the member for Brighton’s procedural motion and the words from my colleagues before, and I would ask that this motion be brought on as soon as possible.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (10:44): I rise to make a short contribution on the procedural motion that is before the house. There are no words that I have that can better articulate this than the member for Narre Warren North, who just a short time ago in this house gave an excellent contribution on what is indeed a very serious matter.

This matter is beyond the politics of this place, and for the motion to be framed in the way that it was by the member for Brighton and then be backed up in a very different manner by the member for Caulfield I think shows the stark difference between the way that those opposite operate and the view that this government takes of these matters. The member for Caulfield’s contribution articulated the position very differently. What we see and what the people of Victoria see time and time again is cheap politics played with an issue that has caused destruction, devastation and the loss of so many lives right across the Middle East.

This government has at every opportunity made representations through the Premier and other members. The anti-vilification work and the work of the Anti-Racism Taskforce, which I had the opportunity to chair in my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, was done yesterday and months ago and will be done tomorrow, and on and on it goes. It is of empirical value to this government. We know and understand that these issues are deeply personal, and our state – our great multicultural, multi-faith state, where one in every two Victorians either has a parent born overseas or was born overseas themselves – thrives on that multiculturalism. Absolutely, we have seen it tested, and it will be tested and tested again. But what true leadership is – and we have seen this from the Premier – is making sure that we are supporting and working with local communities when they are tested. For this motion to be rolled through the house this morning in the fashion that it was speaks volumes to what some – not all, but some – on that side of the house are about.

We remain committed to making sure that we are supporting every single Victorian in every single way, and the commitments made by the Premier and the work that has been done by the government will continue. The opportunity to go and speak to local communities within your electorate or communities right across the state makes your role as a member of Parliament so central. It is so critically important that we make sure that we maintain safety and security and make sure that we are working with our communities to support them in a time of need. What I think we have seen with this debate – and, sadly, what we see time and time again on this matter – is something that I think shows a stark difference between many members in this house. What we have seen in the first couple of contributions from those opposite is indeed a very, very distant position when it comes to values and when it comes to respect.

I want to finish by acknowledging again the outstanding contribution from my good friend the member for Narre Warren North and by saying that this government will, each and every day, stand for supporting communities and for a safer, fairer, better Victoria. That is shown by the Premier and cabinet ministers and all colleagues. We remain committed to all of that work that goes into the anti-racism taskforce, the anti-vilification work and the commitments that are made. Playing cheap politics with this issue is not what is required.

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to make a contribution on this motion.

**Leave refused.**

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (28):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway

*Noes (49):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

**Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:55):** I am delighted to rise to contribute to the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, and I have always been a great supporter of Jobs First. The significance in my region is what I want to talk about today. Geelong has benefited so much from Local Jobs First, and we have benefited through employment, the job creation that has come about with major infrastructure projects, the local businesses, the tradies – you name it. Everybody has benefited from the Local Jobs First legislation that we have in place, and I am delighted that we are keeping to that commitment from the 2022 election to strengthen this legislation. It is so important to keep this going, and I know how valuable this has been for my electorate of Geelong.

The many infrastructure projects that have been built and are being built in the Geelong electorate are unprecedented. It is unprecedented, the number of new construction sites and infrastructure projects from the Allan Labor government and the former Andrews government that have delivered jobs, and some of these jobs have been life-changing for members of my community. To get traineeships and

apprenticeships working on those big construction jobs has actually changed their life, and that has been through a number of services in the Geelong community that work with people who have been long-term unemployed – maybe nobody in their family has ever worked previously, and they become mentors in their family. I have met a lot of those people. The advantages of having the Big Build projects but also Local Jobs First really have resonated in my community. Also, for the Aboriginal community to be able to get jobs, whether it is apprenticeships or traineeships or through contributing to the fabric of these buildings through their beautiful cultural artwork, has really been significant for my region.

Of course when those opposite were in government, not one thing was built in the Geelong electorate – not one. We now have seen a huge transformation around the City of Greater Geelong. We have the best regional arts centre in this country, and that was through this government making a commitment to the \$140 million development of the Geelong Arts Centre, not to mention the fact that that was stage 3. Stage 1 and stage 2 have already happened, and stage 3 was completed last year. That actually created a huge number of jobs but also ensured that local businesses had the opportunity to work on those jobs. The content was really important. The Godfrey Hirst carpet manufacturer did all the carpets through that building, and why that is so important is that they did the carpet to meet the artistic requirements of the Aboriginal community which was involved in putting that carpet design into that building. Having moonah trees throughout one of the floors is absolutely incredible on the carpets.

First Nations themes were integrated into every aspect of the design, including the walls and the carpet. The incredible artwork of First Peoples like Kait James, Gerard Black, Tarryn Love, Mick Ryan and Corrina Eccles all form part of the fabric of that building. They were a big part of that building, and they were local First Nations people that were committed to sharing their culture.

We also have the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre under construction, almost complete. We have a significant number of trainees and apprenticeships involved in that construction. We started off with 12 local trainees and apprentices and then followed with a further 16. Through that early engagement with the social procurement program, local businesses and companies have been contracted as part of that construction, which has added huge benefits obviously to the Geelong economy, and it is due for completion early next year, which Geelong is very excited about.

But the important thing about this is the local content, and that local content is only there because of the Local Jobs First legislation. It says they must be included. The women's and children's hospital, which recently commenced in Geelong – again, hundreds of jobs. Since 2014 there have been thousands of jobs for Geelong people. It is really interesting that over the last 10 years some of those construction workers started on the early jobs and are now still working on either Nyaal Banyul or the women's and children's hospital. So they have had consistent employment for 10 years, and hopefully that will continue as we move forward. But the women's and children's hospital, again, is providing that local content, ensuring that local construction workers are getting the work that they need.

Part of all of this is the big infrastructure projects that we have seen in Geelong creating jobs, using local content and making sure that local businesses are getting a part of that. The early parenting centre that we opened last year, the Moorabool Street mental health hub and drug and alcohol centre, the acute mental health facility, the youth mental health facility, the Gordon TAFE culinary school and the Davidson restaurant, the Victorian Sailing School, the family violence court, which is under construction right now – all of those big builds have had the benefits of this legislation, and I am delighted that we are improving that and giving it more strength in its delivery, because that is what makes my community the best community, and the local economic development that comes from that is extraordinary.

The Kardinia Park stadium is another one – a huge number of jobs.

**A member** interjected.

**Chris COUZENS:** Go Cats, of course. These are the things that are really important to my community, and these jobs would not have been created, these businesses would not have that work, if it were not for this legislation. So to strengthen it I think is incredible. I am really passionate about this because I can see the benefits to my community, to the families that live in my community and to the workers that rely on that consistent construction work to be able to keep food on their families' tables. This is really important legislation.

When we look at what we have done over a 10-year period with this legislation, with the Big Builds that have gone on, particularly, as I said, in my electorate of Geelong, I want young people to know that those jobs are going to continue to be there as we move forward into the future. I know that people in my electorate see that and understand it and support the work that this government has done over the last 10 years. It is about connecting the dots, and it is about making sure our TAFE sector is delivering the courses and training that are required to be able to meet the demands of these big infrastructure projects. The Nyaal Banyul conference centre is working with Gordon TAFE, for example, right now to ensure that there is local content not only in the construction but also in the ongoing employment of people in my community.

The Aboriginal community know we are not closing the gap as quickly as we should be, but let me tell you what these projects that I am talking about are actually contributing to closing the gap in my community. They are creating jobs for Aboriginal people in my community, not only in construction but right across the Geelong community. I highly recommend this bill. I think it provides so much, and I commend the bill to the house.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (11:05): I rise to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. This is a classic case of misdirection, I am afraid to say. The government is doing everything but address the problems that are hampering growth in local jobs, local programs and the capital program across Victoria. There is some irony in that. The government could do something about the real problems that are at the heart of jobs growth in Victoria, which still boasts the highest rate of unemployment in the country, whether on seasonal or on trend terms. Last week's ABS figures confirmed that Victoria has the highest level of unemployment in the country amongst the states. That is saying something. So when this bill came before the house, we would have liked to have seen some substantive measures that would actually promote jobs growth in this great state, but we are not seeing anything. All we are seeing in this bill, as other speakers have pointed out and which I too have noted, is that the government is focusing on penalties – how to punish people who are trying to do their best.

Let us look at some of the major failings confronting the government here. Skills, apprenticeships and traineeships – Victoria continues to perform poorly. In 2023 through to 2024 nationally we saw a fall of 27,000 apprenticeships and traineeships across the country. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research pointed out that we are not producing enough graduates in the construction sector to meet just the requirements of addressing the housing crisis, forgetting infrastructure projects. We are nowhere near meeting those. We have seen a collapse nationally of 13.5 per cent in female apprentices and trainees and, importantly, in Victoria – to look at our state – between 2023 and 2024 we saw a fall in the number of apprenticeships and traineeships of over 8 per cent. We are going backwards in this state when it comes to producing the workforce we need.

I see that there are young people in the gallery today. We owe it to them and all of the young people across our state to be putting before this house policies that will actually give them the opportunities to undertake employment in the important work that goes with building our state. It is a great shame. We know that we have pressing needs to deliver infrastructure right across our state, but we do not have a workforce that will do that. If you look at the majority of occupations on the occupation shortage list, you will see that most of them require a vocational qualification, and yet we are nowhere near meeting that in this state.

Where is that dealt with in this bill? This bill is not addressing that. It is probably the single most important thing the government could do to address the problem. If you want to promote local jobs,

local employment, that is where you would start. You would also look at the catastrophic failure of policy of this government to address the role of the CFMEU in our capital program, particularly major projects. It alone has forced many local operators off projects. We used to ask questions. Last year we asked a series of questions of the government about why Indigenous firms and firms that were not approved by the CFMEU were kicked off Victoria's project pipeline. How disastrous was that for local jobs? And what did the government do? Rather than commission the royal commission that we called for, the government appointed Mr Greg Wilson – who personally I have no problem with at all – who was given no power to properly investigate the corruption, intimidation, blackmail and extortion that is occurring daily on major projects in this state. He was not given the power to investigate those and to give real recommendations to government.

Why was that important? Because we have over \$145 billion worth of projects in the government's capital program at the moment. We know that most of those are blowing out. We know that most of those blowouts are due to the role of the CFMEU, combined with incompetence and a total lack of cost control by the government. That is not just me and my colleagues saying that, that is Victoria's Auditor-General. Have a look at the Auditor-General's report from February of this year, and you will see a scathing assessment not only of the total mismanagement and failure of oversight over major projects but also the unwillingness – in fact the refusal – of this government to be up-front with the Victorian people about blowouts and delays on major projects.

How is that important to this bill? Well, it is important to this bill because those problems are one of the greatest impediments to local jobs growth. If you have a project pipeline, and public sector demand in this state is what has been propping up the economy for a long time – and I will come to private sector investment in a moment – and if you are not going to fix these problems, local organisations that employ Victorians in their workplaces will not come anywhere near being able to participate in delivering the works required to make this state greater and to deliver the schools, the roads, the public transport, the hospitals, all manner of community infrastructure pieces. They miss out. The question I ask is: where is that in this bill? Where is the policy to address that? Sadly, we saw the government simply engage in a whitewashing exercise that will see all of those nefarious practices that we know are occurring on Victoria's major projects continue to occur.

A third aspect I wanted to mention is tax in this state. If you want to promote local jobs, make Victoria a more attractive place to invest. But we have seen the CommSec report, we have seen the Business Council of Australia survey, the National Australia Bank survey and any number of stakeholder groups – like the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group – all condemn the level of taxation and the level of regulation, putting Victoria at the bottom of the rankings of states and territories across Australia when it comes to providing a place to invest. It is no wonder that many firms look to invest elsewhere. The taxes – whether it is payroll tax or the land tax that many developers in the housing construction sector have to continue to pay because of delays by this government – and red tape in the construction sector mean we are seeing many employers say, 'Look, it's too hard to invest here; we're going to invest somewhere else.' That is evidenced by these independent reports from a range of employer groups and stakeholder groups across the country. Where is that addressed in this bill? Where is the hope that is provided to the Victorian people and investors, businesses and workers? Where is the hope that should be coming from this government that says, 'We will give you a business environment where you will invest and employ local people.' That is not addressed in this bill.

I want to come to debt, because that sits behind a lot of this. The government's debt profile, the position it has put our state in, has meant that the opportunities to roll out and make final decisions on important infrastructure projects around our state – I am not just talking about mega projects, some of which we need; they always have to be sequenced – but I am talking about those many road and public transport projects and health projects that are needed right across Victoria, in particular across our growth corridors and throughout the regions and rural precincts of this state. The ability to invest in those which will promote local jobs and local investment is being denied because our debt, in net terms just

for the general government sector, we know will be nearly \$200 billion. But bear in mind the gross debt in this state will approach \$300 billion by 2028–29 – \$300 billion in gross debt. The reason that is important is because that is an indication of the financial and fiscal health of a state, and even the Auditor-General has pointed this out. S & P Global makes the point that on this trajectory our gross debt profile puts us at risk of a credit downgrade, because our debt in gross terms compared with our operating revenue is at the moment on track to exceed that tripwire of 240 per cent by later in this decade. If that happens, we are looking at a downgrade. We do not have to wait for that timeline to happen, but we are on that trajectory at the moment.

The total financial mismanagement of this state government is limiting choices and limiting investment opportunities for local firms and, importantly, Victorian workers and their families, and we ought to have their backs. We would on this side of the house, but it does not appear the government does. They are not prepared to address the real problems, so this bill is one we are opposing. It does not deal with the real issues at the heart of local jobs growth, and all of the evidence from the ABS figures to our debt, to our taxes, to the corruption on worksites continues without restraint.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (11:15): I am pleased to have the opportunity this morning to make a contribution on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 and to make some reflections on where we find ourselves in relation to major infrastructure works, local content, supporting local jobs and of course making sure that our communities are able to gain the skills and the tools that they need to work in a great job and to be able to use those skills to go on and get better and further employment.

I just want to make some brief observations on some of the comments that were made by the previous speaker, who failed to mention that in the period between 2010 and 2014 this state had the highest unemployment on the mainland. Fast-forward to where we find ourselves now, in 2025, with an economy that over the last decade has grown faster than any other state – 31 per cent larger than when we came to government – and the labour market continuing with Victoria's employment increasing by 12,800 people in June 2025 and of course in the year to June 2025 unemployment averaging 4.4 per cent, remaining below a 20-year prepandemic average of 5.5 per cent.

What we on this side of the house know and understand – and those significant investments have been made for over a decade now, and some of those have been referenced and touched on in the contributions from other members – is the importance of making sure that that investment benefits local communities. The contributions that we have heard thus far on this bill go to some sort of bizarre position where you are able to support growing communities whereby you do not build anything and you are able to support growing communities without upgrading roads, without building new schools and without delivering world-class public transport, like the Metro Tunnel, like the removal of 87 dangerous and congested level crossings, and you are able to do all that and just roll through and keep communities ticking along.

We have a vastly different view to that, and that goes to having the benefit of new transport infrastructure, new schools, new community hospitals – whatever the service might be – and to knowing and understanding not only that that growth and the many provisions that have been contained within the numerous announcements made around planning and housing go to supporting local communities but also that the economics of this stacks up. It does so whereby the economy, as we know and as I referenced earlier with some of that data, is growing, and the ability for the government to be able to provide for that infrastructure and to be able to see significant benefits in efficiency from those projects is something that often is left very much out of this argument.

To be able to provide for projects like Metro, like the Suburban Rail Loop and like the West Gate Tunnel, to be able to do that and move people out and about and around in our local communities and across the state to get to where they need to go more safely and sooner is something that we are of course committed to. What we saw in that period that I referenced earlier, the sort of miserable years between 2010 and 2014, was a considerable lack of investment, of drive and of energy, and local communities felt that in a number of ways.

But where this bill is very important is delivering those skills and those opportunities that we know are critically important as part of the program and the projects that I have mentioned. A really significant and long list has been built by this government over the best part of 10 years now to deliver both the big transport infrastructure projects but also those projects such as arterial road upgrades in the outer suburbs and many others where there are provisions for local communities to get employment and to be supported. This is really important because it creates not only the skills and the opportunities but also the confidence. I think often what we see, disappointingly, from the crew that occupies the opposition benches over there is a sort of parallel universe where no money should be spent, no projects should be delivered and communities do not need to be supported in each and every way. The reality is that you have got to make those decisions and make those decisions wisely and carefully, taking the advice of all of our agencies, which do great work when it comes to supporting and providing information for decisions that government need to make. But what we have been able to do through that process is make sure that we have got that pipeline that is delivering those jobs and will continue to deliver those jobs as we move forward.

This morning's amendment bill delivers on the 2022 election commitment to strengthen the Local Jobs First Act 2003, whereby we are ensuring the Local Jobs First scheme continues to maximise opportunities for local jobs and businesses, supporting a stronger workforce, local industry and, as I mentioned earlier, the economy, being fit for purpose and meeting contemporary expectations as things change. The reforms in the bill focus on compliance and enforcement of the local industry development plans and strengthening the powers and functions of the Local Jobs First commissioner to provide for those reforms as we go forward.

In summary, the clarification and strengthening of the mechanisms to support compliance with the enforcement of the local industry development plan commitments provide the commissioner with additional investigation and reporting powers, including the power to conduct site inspections without notice, and a range of other functions which, given the time, I will not go through in great detail. Broadly, though, this builds upon the commitments made for supporting local skills and local employment and builds upon what I think are additional layers of support for local communities but also benefits in the long term.

I have the opportunity, Acting Speaker Addison, as I am sure you do and other members of the house do, to go out, be onsite and meet a number of different workers in so many different settings that are getting the opportunity to work on these projects, to learn new skills, to support their families in many instances and to work locally. Again, time means I have not had the opportunity to talk about many of the commitments that I believe benefit regional Victoria, which is incredibly important as well. To have those manufacturing benefits right across the state is something that is very, very important. That work needs to continue to be delivered. It is a live, dynamic and complex environment. Changes relating to global geopolitics have seen a number of changes that go to production costs and material costs, and that dynamic environment adds additional pressure. But to provide those benefits with the project, the material, the manufacturing and the delivery is something that is very, very important. The references that are contained within this bill that go to supporting local jobs right here in Victoria underpin the entire network of supporting people to get those skills and to benefit from those projects in the long run.

The alternative approach of course is to do very little or to do not much, and that is certainly not what we are about. We need to remain focused on supporting a growing economy, supporting a growing Victoria and making sure that people can get home safer and sooner as we grow but also using new and innovative ways to plan and to interlink with transport, jobs, health and education to get people home and to and from work, school and business the way that they need to. That is why this program is really important. This piece of legislation builds upon some really good work that has been done by our delivery agencies and will I believe add to the ability to do what is most important, and that is to support people to be their best as they benefit from our growing state.

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (11:25): I rise to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. Let me first be clear: the opposition supports putting jobs and businesses first, in particular supporting local jobs. This has never been in question, but what is in question is whether this bill will actually achieve that goal or whether it will end up penalising the very businesses it claims to support. Since its inception in 2003 the Local Jobs First policy has played a vital role in ensuring that government procurement benefits local businesses, workers, apprentices and trainees. We support that and we support strengthening compliance where necessary, but this bill goes too far. It introduces a series of punitive enforcement mechanisms, all the way from deprioritisation registers to hefty civil penalties, without adequate safeguards for small and regional businesses already doing it tough. The reality is this: local content targets are often achievable, but where they are not being met it is often or usually for a very good reason, not negligence or bad faith. Master Builders Victoria has rightly pointed out that regional skills shortages can make it impossible or at least very difficult to source local subcontractors, no matter how hard a head contractor tries.

Yet under this bill those same contractors could be penalised, deprioritised for future work or even hit with fines of up to \$100,000. This is a ‘stick without a carrot’ approach. It risks creating more red tape, more uncertainty and more financial risk for the very businesses we rely on to deliver infrastructure and jobs across Victoria. Worse still, this Labor government cannot even tell us what this will cost. When questioned during the bill briefing, government officials were unable to or unwilling to provide any modelling or estimates on the budget impact of these sweeping new powers. A new inspection regime, expanded commissioner functions and civil proceedings in court – all of those things require staff and resources, but the Labor government has chosen to push this bill forward with zero or very little transparency on cost and no clarity on implementation. In fact when asked what evidence exists of widespread noncompliance to justify these measures, the department admitted that it is unaware of any civil actions or penalties previously imposed under the Local Jobs First framework. That begs the question: what is the real problem we are trying to solve here?

Let us also be clear about who bears the brunt. Larger contractors with in-house legal teams of compliance officers may be able to absorb these changes, but for small operators, particularly in rural and regional Victoria – those with a handful of employees, those juggling jobs across the state – the risk of being fined or blacklisted from future work is devastating. These are the businesses that are the backbone of our local economies. They deserve support, not suspicion. This bill is just yet another slap in the face for small businesses who have faced a period of unprecedented destruction under the current Allan and former Andrews Labor governments, and this after we had the six lockdowns during COVID-19, which spanned 262 days, that contributed to the widespread destruction of small business. Between 2022 and March 2024 we had 3085 businesses leave Victoria, the largest net departure in Australia. Last year we had 129,000 Victorian businesses also close up shop. We have had 61 new or increased taxes under this Labor government since 2014, further impacting small businesses and their viability.

Victoria now ranks the worst in regulatory competitiveness, and we are officially the worst place in Australia to run a business. Then the government goes and introduces this slap-in-the-face bill that punishes, not partners. It says, ‘We don’t trust you, and we’ll fine you if you fall short.’ There is no recognition of the reality that businesses face, like rural skill shortages, costs or supply issues. Rather than flexibility, this bill enshrines rigid punitive compliance mechanisms. It is one of the most tone-deaf bills that the Labor government has put forward this year.

Now, in the Mornington context, as the member for Mornington, I speak daily with local business owners, small business owners, family businesses and their employees who are doing it tough. They are hardworking, community-minded people running things like family cafes, tourism ventures, boat charters, local shops and more. They do not ask for special treatment. They ask, though, for fairness, from a government that supports, not stifles, their success, and that supports their aspiration and supports local employment. I particularly know this having run small businesses and organisations myself. I take the situation in the last couple of years at Mornington Pier, for example. I fought for



businesses like The Rocks cafe and Schnapper Point Kiosk and other businesses like Ocean Bay Fish and Chips who reported an at least 20 to 30 per cent drop in trade during the paid parking trial under the former council – customers stayed away, local jobs were lost and livelihoods were put at risk. At Mornington Boat Hire, around half of its business was impacted. The operator described it as a nightmare to keep the doors open. Following sustained community pressure, that trial was concluded.

But the pressures that this Labor government continue to put on these and other businesses are enormous. More recently we have had the heartbreaking closure of several beloved small businesses in Mornington. After more than 50 years serving our community, John Pugsley's Mornington Village newsagency has closed its doors, and that is in part attributed to growing rent; there has been a pressure on that because of land tax and everything else that has been put up under this Labor government, as well as other red tape and costs. Also Mickey Blue, a local clothing store of over 20 years, and Peter Young Shoes, a business of over 30 years, are also closing. Main Desire, a gift shop in Mornington, also closed recently. In Mount Martha, the traders are also struggling. Earlier this year Wok on Bay in Mount Martha, an excellent Chinese restaurant, had to close its doors. Many are being impacted by the increasing taxes and red tape, not helped, for example, by the higher payroll tax we pay on the Mornington Peninsula for being classified by the state government as metropolitan, despite the fact that we hardly get any metropolitan benefits. It is very hard to get young people employed, to start with, because there is a lack of housing and everything else on the peninsula, and to employ young people in particular, it is very hard when you have to pay that higher payroll tax compared to, say, Geelong or Horsham, where I grew up, or elsewhere.

It is sometimes very saddening to walk down Main Street in Mornington or Lochiel Avenue in Mount Martha, or indeed many other places in my electorate. Whenever I see any closed shopfronts, 'For lease' signs, businesses who are struggling with few customers, or businesses who are struggling due to higher rents or costs, it is always a terrible thing to see. These shops, some new and some longstanding, have been community hubs, offering jobs, friendship and a sense of belonging to generations of locals. Customers depended on Pugsley's morning paper, fashion advice at Mickey Blue, expert fittings at Peter Young Shoes, gifts for loved ones at Main Desire and delicious family dinners at Wok on Bay. These are the sorts of businesses that must be supported by the state Labor government as they are integral to local jobs in our area and indeed in many other areas across Victoria. Whether it is in the member for Malvern's seat or the member for Brighton's seat or elsewhere in this state, in regional Victoria and metropolitan Victoria and elsewhere, we need to support local jobs and local businesses.

Despite proven track records for many more established businesses, say in Mornington and elsewhere, and wonderful business ideas for the newer ones, our small business owners are drowning in red tape, planning fees and high state taxes. Licence levies, rental pressures and arbitrary regulations consume precious time and resources, often forcing longstanding traders out altogether.

This is the reality of doing business under this Allan Labor government, the highest taxing state government in the country, with, as I mentioned, 61 new or increased taxes and a ballooning debt nearing \$194 billion, which will soon be nearly \$29 million of taxpayer-funded interest every single day and an ever-growing compliance burden. To make matters worse, this government continues to cost-shift responsibilities onto local councils, forcing them to fill gaps by doing things like introducing paid parking, as I mentioned earlier, or other revenue measures that can often devastate local trade and tourism. We must be serious about supporting local jobs and local business, and this is not the way to do it.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (11:35): I am proud to stand in the chamber today and speak in support of the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. This bill is all about making the Local Jobs First framework stricter, ensuring that Victorian businesses and workers benefit from state government procurement. I want to use this legislation to speak about not only the benefits to my constituency and to small and medium businesses, but also about how, more broadly, this government is creating an economy that works for everyday Victorians.

I would like to begin by broadly summarising the changes in the bill and how they fit into the existing Local Jobs First framework. The Local Jobs First Act 2003, formerly known as the Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003, was delivered under the Bracks Labor government and is focused on promoting employment growth by expanding market opportunities for local industry and encouraging industry development. The Local Jobs First Act 2003 is Australia's longest-standing industry participation legislation, which provides additional opportunities for Victorian businesses and workers to supply government projects. Since 2014 Local Jobs First has been applied to more than 3000 projects totalling almost \$200 billion in government investment. Projects with a value of more than a million dollars in regional Victoria or \$3 million in metropolitan Melbourne or statewide activities fall under the Victorian Industry Participation Policy, which encourages small and medium enterprises to tender for the purchase of goods and services. In addition, the Major Project Skills Guarantee, which also falls under the framework, ensures that all construction projects valued at \$20 million or more are required to use Victorian apprentices, trainees or cadets for at least 10 per cent of the total estimated labour hours. This has been applied to almost 500 projects worth over \$176 billion, supporting close to 20,000 apprentices, trainees and cadets. The changes made in this bill provide the Local Jobs First commissioner with additional investigation and reporting powers, such as the ability to conduct site inspections and to facilitate the resolution of issues regarding potential and actual noncompliance with the act, regulations, Local Jobs First policy or a local industry development plan.

Another key change in this bill strengthens the way strategic projects contribute to local industry. While the act already allows the minister to determine minimum local content requirements for strategic projects – for example, ensuring that a minimum percentage of the total project value is spent on local goods and services – this bill goes further by empowering the minister to set requirements for the use of locally produced uniforms and personal protective equipment on these projects. This reform not only reinforces the government's commitment to ensuring that funding spent on major projects supports Victorian jobs but also provides a significant boost to our local textile, clothing and footwear industry. By embedding these requirements, we are helping to sustain and grow Victorian manufacturers, creating more opportunities for local suppliers and workers to benefit directly from government investment.

The reforms present in this bill are a result of extensive consultation. The reforms were crafted by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and take into account feedback from multiple phases of consultation, including written submissions received via the public consultation process on Engage Victoria and targeted consultation with departments and agencies, industry associations, contractors and unions.

I would particularly like to note the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance, SEMMA, which is in my neck of the woods, and their comments on this bill:

Local projects should be supplied by local manufacturers first and foremost. Manufacturing locally ensures local jobs, and the economy is stronger.

The reforms in this bill will be implemented in two stages, with some elements beginning the day after royal assent and a majority of reforms commencing on or before 1 July 2026.

If we compare this legislation and its application to the previous time those opposite were in government, it makes it very clear which political party prioritises Victorian workers and jobs. During the Baillieu–Napthine years from 2010 to 2014, only eight projects were declared strategic, with mandatory local content set. It is incredibly telling that, adjusting for the length of this government's time in office, we have overseen more than 17 times the number of strategic projects. I see this legislation and the Local Jobs First policy framework more broadly as part of this government's pledge to be a government that fights for everyday Victorians and fosters an economy that works for people, not the other way around.

This framework delivers for Victorians. It ensures that Victorian businesses and workers are the ones that benefit from Victorian government spending. It means jobs in our communities, better wages and stable long-term employment for workers and prosperous small and medium-sized businesses. It is about fostering a community that is about more than profits and productivity. This virtuous cycle benefits more than those who are directly employed by the government. I would like to refer back to SEMMA's comments, which make the same statement. Take the Major Project Skills Guarantee as an example. In my electorate there are young tradies who are working on the Big Build. Those workers are gaining experience, they have stable employment and it means that they will have the opportunity and the skills to expand their career and perhaps set up their own small business. That small business will then employ future workers. This creates more competition in the industry, and it creates prosperity in the local economy. That prosperity means better public services for everyone, which means a greater standard of living for all – and all of this is before factoring in the benefits that the local projects themselves provide.

If we go back to my community, we can look at the level crossing removal works, we can look at the brand new Noble Park station and we can look at the numerous school and health upgrades that have occurred in the electorate of Mulgrave. That government spending has been a part of this cycle, creating jobs, growing the economy and increasing productivity for my whole community. All of this is part of the reason why Victorians have seen more than 800,000 new jobs created since this government was elected.

I would like to once again reaffirm my strong support for this bill and thank the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing and his team for the extensive work they have undertaken to bring these reforms forward. The Local Jobs First framework has been a cornerstone of our approach to ensuring that government investment directly benefits Victorian workers, businesses and communities. For more than 20 years it has helped to grow local industries; create good, secure jobs; and support thousands of apprentices, trainees and cadets to start their careers on major government projects. These reforms take that commitment even further, strengthening compliance powers, expanding opportunities for local businesses to supply strategic projects and ensuring that everyday items like uniforms and PPE are made right here in Victoria. By embedding stronger requirements for local content, we are reinforcing an economy that works for people, not just for profits – one that gives Victorian businesses the chance to thrive and gives Victorian workers the opportunities they deserve. This bill is a practical, forward-looking piece of legislation that ensures Local Jobs First will continue to be at the forefront of industrial participation policy well into the future. I am proud to commend this bill to the house, confident that it will deliver lasting benefits for our state, our industries and our communities.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (11:45): I rise to make a contribution on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, and in starting off that contribution I think we would all be in heated agreement about wanting local jobs in our particular regions, but I am afraid that we are spending Parliament's time debating a bill where we are basically in agreement because the government does not want to debate the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. The government is hiding behind this debate because they are frightened to debate the VicGrid bill. We are going to get less than 2 hours on the VicGrid bill this afternoon. That is an absolute insult to all the people that have been on the front steps of this Parliament over the last few sitting weeks raising concerns about what is being proposed in the VicGrid bill, and we are now having debate stifled so that we actually, on behalf of our constituents, do not get an opportunity to put forward their argument as to why that bill is so wrong for Victoria and particularly so wrong for regional Victorians where they are going to be forced to host infrastructure, they are going to be forced to have people enter their property against their will, they are going to be fined if they actually stop people going on their property and if someone cuts their locks to get in they will be fined again.

**Anthony Cianflone**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is not referring to this bill at all in any way, shape or form. He is foreshadowing potential debate on a bill that is on the agenda

but not being debated now. I ask you to draw him back to the current bill that is before the house, please.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison):** As one of the most experienced members of this chamber I think the member for Murray Plains knows that he should be talking about the VicGrid bill later this afternoon, and if he could get on track to the jobs first bill that would be most appreciated.

**Peter WALSH:** Thank you for your advice, Acting Speaker, but I am talking about local jobs, and that goes to the very heart of what I started to speak about before – that my community and a number of communities close to my electorate are going to be forced to host renewable energy infrastructure and new transmission lines. There are no rules around those projects actually having local content and local jobs. So those projects are going to be built with government subsidies, in some cases by the SEC, as those on the other side proudly talk about all the time, but there is no compulsion on those projects to actually employ local people to do those particular jobs. There is no compulsion on those projects to have Australian procurement of what goes into those projects. So if you look at a renewable energy solar farm, there is no large-scale manufacturer of solar panels in Australia, so those projects that are going to be in my electorate and adjoining electorates are going to have solar panels that are made in China. So that is not a local manufacturer. Where there are going to be wind towers built, again with government subsidies or under the guise of government instrumentalities, there is no manufacturer of wind towers in Australia, so those wind towers are going to be imported from overseas. So again there is no compulsion for local jobs for solar farms or for wind farms, because the infrastructure is going to come from overseas.

When it comes to large batteries, and the government makes a lot about the large batteries and how that is going to be part of the future, three-quarters of the large batteries in the world are made in China. There is very limited manufacture of large-scale batteries here in Australia. So again, there is no compulsion on those projects that are being put into my community and other regional communities that they actually be manufactured in Australia and that they actually create Australian jobs. They are creating jobs in China and they are creating jobs in Europe; that is not to the benefit of our community. So the government actually needs to walk the talk when it talks about putting local jobs first, because in reality the renewable energy projects that are going to be built will not contain Australian content; it will be imported. So the commitment from the other side of the house is hollow when it comes to renewable energy projects that are going into my electorate.

There are no plans in place to actually handle the redundancy of that infrastructure. So not only are we going to import the solar panels from China, not only are we going to import the wind towers from overseas, in 20 or 25 years when that infrastructure is redundant and its useful life has ended there is no plan to recycle any of that particular infrastructure. So my communities are going to have their tips filled with solar panels that were imported from China by a government that say they are interested in supporting local jobs when they are not; they are not walking the talk when it comes to those procurement policies for renewable energy projects,

There is no consultation with the community around those particular projects. There is lip-service paid. There are people from Melbourne, who have no concept of regional communities, going out and talking to them about these projects. They cannot even talk the same language. It is like Venus and Mars when it comes to those people that come out and talk to my regional communities, and all they do is ostracise those communities by how they treat them and the disrespect that they show to them through that process. They will sprinkle a bit of fairy dust, they will donate a bit of money to the local footy club, thinking that solves all the issues – it does not. These people, as has been demonstrated by being out on the front steps of Parliament now for a number of sitting weeks, are extremely agitated, unhappy and upset about what is happening to them over that time.

The other issue I want to touch on when it comes to local procurement is other government projects. Acting Speaker Addison, no doubt you have had a number of CFA sheds built in your electorate over time. There is a real issue in how they are procured and how locals never get an opportunity to bid on

those particular projects. Locals do not actually get to do the work on those particular projects. Those particular projects have an exorbitant cost to them. I know, as over the years I have gone to openings of CFA sheds – communities are very grateful for getting those sheds, and in a lot of instances now with the larger fire trucks, they need a new shed to get the fire truck into the shed – they stand there, as someone from the CFA stands up and says, ‘Well, this project cost X amount of dollars.’ They are farmers generally. They understand the cost of building a shed, they understand what is involved in building a shed, and they just shake their heads in amazement at how much that has cost compared to what they can build a similar shed for on their farm. If the government is serious about getting value for taxpayer money and serious about local procurement, it should actually give the local shed builders an opportunity to build CFA sheds. Get the local shed builders and manufacturers to do it. Get the local electrician to come along and do the wiring work. Do not bring people in from outside all the time to do those particular projects.

To finish off, the other pet hate of mine is again in our electorates, where we get money to do a school upgrade or a hospital upgrade. That is always very welcome for our communities. We all collectively fight very hard for our electorates to get money for those particular projects. But under the government’s procurement policies, local commercial builders are effectively ruled out of bidding on those particular projects, because unless they are of a certain scale under the government’s rules, they do not get to bid. That means that they never, ever get a chance at those particular projects. So those on the other side might want to talk about local jobs, talk about how they are helping their community get that, but in regional communities the commercial builders very rarely get an opportunity to bid on government projects because the rules exclude them from it. That means someone from Melbourne gets the project. They may or may not use some locals as subbies to do it. Quite often the offer to the subbies is not good enough for the locals to do the work, so they bring people from Melbourne in to be the subbies on those particular projects. So nearly all the money that would have gone to a local builder, to local subbies, to local tradies, is actually channelled back to Melbourne. The best that the locals can get is some accommodation and meals out of those people actually living in the town while they build those particular projects. If the government is serious about having local content and local people involved from a regional point of view, it should change the rules so regional builders and regional tradies can get a fair go at tendering for those particular projects.

The other thing that you find – and I have had it personally with people coming to my office around renewable energy projects – on some other government projects is that there is a particular legal entity that has the project contract, and when subbies do not get paid – and it quite often happens that people from outside will come in and they will employ locals as subbies – they will have a big fight to get their money. It is just plain wrong that all of a sudden ABC proprietary limited becomes DEF proprietary limited, and then there is a fight about who had the actual head contract and who should pay the subbies. If you are serious about jobs first locally, again, there needs to be some rules around the fact that a company cannot morph from one entity to another entity and then try and cheat and not pay their tradies in what they do with the subbies there. There are a lot of platitudes from the other side of the house, but from a regional point of view I think this actually fails regional communities.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (11:55): I rise to support the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. In doing so I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing and Minister for Creative Industries, his office, his team and his department for their work in bringing this bill to the house and all other relevant ministers involved. We know fundamentally the important role job creation plays in not only the state’s prosperity but the prosperity of every household, family and individual, because a job is more than just a paycheque – it provides a sense of purpose, achievement and certainty for every family. The foundations of helping people to aspire and meet cost-of-living needs is the essential role of jobs that very much underpin the socio-economic wellbeing and prosperity of our entire community. Providing safe, secure and good paying jobs for people of all backgrounds and experiences is at the heart of any resilient, vibrant community.

That is why since 2014 we have continued to place job creation, skills and training and learning at the heart of our economic management approach. Driven by our Big Build infrastructure program, our Local Jobs First Act 2003 and our ongoing investment in frontline services, including education, health and community services, Victoria is leading all other states in terms of real economic growth, which has remained the case over the last decade. We have added over \$138 billion in value and worth to the Victorian economy. Gross state product, GSP, has increased by 1.5 per cent over the 2023–24 period. The economy is now 11.5 per cent larger than prior to the pandemic. Our economy has grown by over 9 per cent in the last two years alone, according to Deloitte. We have continued to generate record numbers of jobs – almost 900,000 jobs have been created since 2014. We have continued to keep downward pressure on unemployment rates. We have supported our business and industries to grow, with more than 113,000 new businesses having been created and opened across Victoria in the last five years. That is 18 per cent growth – higher than any other state in percentage terms. Business investment has grown by 30 per cent since 2020–21, higher than the largest percentage growth of any state, reaching record high shares of overall economic activity. Business investment grew by 3.7 per cent over the year to December 2024, compared to negative 0.1 per cent nationally.

When it comes to the approval and construction of new homes we had supported over 61,000 new home completions as of January 2025, an 8.8 per cent increase year on year, and we have continued to lead the nation when it comes to home approvals. Record numbers of people continue, importantly, to want to visit, move to and live in Victoria, with Melbourne being the most livable city in Australia and 11.9 million international visitors coming to Victoria – record levels. Across many of our economic, financial and socio-economic metrics, despite international economic, trade and inflationary challenges, global geopolitical tensions and international uncertainty, the reality is that Victoria's economy is continuing to grow in a positive, stable and resilient manner, all underpinned by our work to create, sustain and support more jobs for more Victorians. Many of these jobs have been directly and indirectly created thanks to our Big Build infrastructure pipeline and our historic Local Jobs First Act.

The Local Jobs First Act is Australia's longest standing industry participation legislation and has been supporting Victorian businesses and workers for over 20 years – a legacy of the Bracks–Brumby governments. Since coming to office we have continued to strengthen the act, including via the new Local Jobs First Act, in which we established the role of Local Jobs First commissioner and strengthened strategic project listings, with all projects valued at \$50 million or above automatically classified as strategic projects as well as any other projects agreed to by government. Opportunities are available to local industry and workers to contribute to high-value goods, services and construction projects. We have strengthened the act to mandate minimum local content on all major projects, including a 90 per cent minimum on construction projects so that local jobs and businesses grow thanks to these investments. We have enshrined our flagship Major Project Skills Guarantee, requiring that a percentage of work on these projects must go to local apprentices, trainees and cadets. The Major Projects Skills Guarantee applies to all Victorian government construction projects valued at or above \$20 million. The skills guarantee projects include a requirement for a contractor to deliver at least 10 per cent of labour hours using apprentices, trainees and cadets.

When combined, since 2014 Local Jobs First has been applied to 3185 projects worth over \$197 billion in government investment, ensuring that Victorian businesses and workers, apprentices, trainees and cadets benefit from this procurement. Additionally, Local Jobs First local content requirements have been set on 382 strategic projects, supporting more than 60,000 jobs and enabling local companies to compete for both large and small government contracts for Victoria's largest projects. Since its introduction, the Major Project Skills Guarantee has been applied to 480 projects worth over \$176 billion and supported almost 20,000 apprentices, trainees and cadets to secure employment on Victoria's largest construction projects.

Of course some of these major projects of statewide significance that have benefited businesses and workers include the Metro rail tunnel, the Melbourne Airport rail project, the level crossing removal

program, the West Gate Tunnel, the North East Link, the western ring road M80 upgrade, the Mickleham Road upgrade, the Austin Hospital redevelopment, the Northern Hospital upgrade, the new Footscray Hospital, the Orygen youth mental health project, the State Library redevelopment, the Melbourne Convention Centre expansion, the Melbourne Arts Precinct expansion, the Melbourne Park and Rod Laver Arena redevelopment, the State Netball and Hockey Centre in Parkville down the road from my area, the Werribee Open Range Zoo expansion to see the new elephants, the Fitzroy Gasworks project, the new Victoria Police Centre and so much more. At a local level across Merri-bek, my community, we have numerous projects that have also benefited from these measures, including the Upfield level crossing removal through Coburg, the \$115 million Brunswick tram terminal redevelopment, the \$22.5 million Coburg special school project, the \$21 million Strathmore Secondary College technology and arts hub, the \$20 million Newlands Primary School redevelopment, Development Victoria's avenue housing project and, again, many other projects that are benefiting my community economically and socially, locally.

However, with the act having been amended seven years ago, this bill will continue to strengthen the intent, operation and oversight to further maximise those opportunities for local industries and jobs and workers to benefit. In summary, the bill will clarify and strengthen the mechanisms that support compliance with and enforcement of local industry development plan commitments; provide the Local Jobs First commissioner with additional investigation and reporting powers, including a power to conduct site inspections with notice; introduce stronger consequences for noncompliance with local industry development plans and the act, including the deprioritisation scheme; civil penalties for noncompliance with the commissioner's information-gathering powers, including the new site inspection power; and contingent payment mechanisms for agencies to include inappropriate contracts. It will clarify and strengthen existing policies and procedures under the act, incorporate additional Local Jobs First objectives and explicitly allow the minister responsible for the act to set requirements to use a specified amount of locally produced uniform and personal protective equipment, PPE, on strategic projects.

When combined, the bill of course will also acquit our government's 2022 election commitment and ensure that Local Jobs First is fit for purpose and continues to meet contemporary expectations. But it is a bill that also builds on our broader whole-of-government approach to creating more opportunities for Victorian businesses, workers and apprentices. Acting Speaker Mullahy, you will appreciate this. I am proud to be part of the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which is now undertaking a new inquiry into student pathways and in-demand industries. Over 1.4 million workers will be needed in Victoria by 2034, and 85 per cent of those workers and jobs will need post-secondary qualifications. The inquiry is going to be exploring how we can do better in that space, and that is why free TAFE is so important. We have been committed to bringing back free TAFE, which has been at the foundation of this approach – 80 free TAFE courses, over 200,000 Victorians have accessed free TAFE, saving students on average \$3000 per course.

But of course this is in stark contrast to the Liberals, who undertook record cuts when it came to TAFE. They ripped \$1 billion out of the TAFE system. The Liberals shut 22 TAFE campuses. The Liberals sacked 2000 TAFE teachers. At the last federal election do not forget it was Peter Dutton and Senator Sarah Henderson who came out and said they opposed free TAFE, and I wonder why they lost the federal election. In droves, people turned away from the Liberals because of that position. On local projects it is also because of our work through local jobs that we are creating more jobs. Again, this is in stark contrast to the Liberals. We have approved 382 strategic projects through the strategic projects pipeline and 480 projects through the skills guarantee. The Liberals, in contrast, when they were in office between 2010 and 2014, approved how many projects? Eight projects, and they left office with Victoria having a record-high unemployment rate at the time of almost 7 per cent.

Notwithstanding that, they have come into this chamber to move a reasoned amendment to essentially pause and defer further consideration of this bill, which I can assure the opposition, if that were to be the case, would make things worse for Victorian businesses and workers, providing fewer

opportunities for Victorian businesses and workers to benefit from our local major projects. We know the Liberals are only concerned about one job, and that is the job of the Leader of the Opposition. They have turned over that many leaders of the opposition, but they are also creating more jobs in the legal system with the amount of court cases, subpoenas and hearings that are taking place. That is the way they are generating jobs. We are generating jobs on the ground through grassroots communities.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:05): Given the member for Pascoe Vale's performance on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, I feel as though I could be speaking about rainbows, ponies, unicorns, whatever the hell I want to talk about, because as much as I have regard and respect for the member for Pascoe Vale, he did waste the opportunity to speak on something which should be deeply important to every member of this place. He missed that opportunity, and that is a great, great, great shame. It is a great shame because it is a government bill that is proposed. I mean, we have only heard the government talking points on this bill, I do not know, at least 15 or 20 times before, and according to the government this is the best thing since sliced bread and then some. Clearly the member for Pascoe Vale actually got through those government-issued and sanctioned talking points far too quickly and so therefore decided to turn his attention on attacking the opposition, as opposed to using the opportunity he had to speak in this place to talk about the great things that the government is doing, or he just got fed up with the talking points, did not believe the talking points that were government sanctioned and decided to have a crack at us anyway. The first thing I want to do in my contribution today is to thank the shadow minister the member for Kew for her analysis and contribution that she made on this bill just yesterday.

**Jess Wilson** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL**: Tuesday, in fact. It is not an easy job to do that, but she has done a stellar job in preparing the position of the opposition. As you will be aware, Acting Speaker Mullahy, and I am sure the chamber will be aware, the member for Kew has proposed a reasoned amendment that the coalition is moving that addresses the potential financial impact on Victorian businesses, particularly small operators in rural and regional areas, and provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in this bill. I think everyone in this place, certainly from the major parties, can agree that the principle of Local Jobs First should be something that we all subscribe to. I mean, who does not want to see another Victorian, who does not want to see another Australian in a highly paid job? We know that when you are in a well-paid job, you are not just providing for yourself but providing for your family. You are contributing to your community in the greatest possible sense of the word. You are standing on your own two feet, and you are not being reliant upon others. You are a lifter. You are a leader. These are all wonderful principles that I would like to think that at least the two major parties in this chamber agree on. But we do have concerns with this bill, and it is not just the opposition that has concerns with this bill. It is also stakeholders which have concerns with this bill. For example, Master Builders Victoria have issues with this bill, and they in fact wrote to the member for Narracan, my friend and colleague Mr Farnham, dated 22 July 2025:

While our industry supports the intent of Local Jobs First –  
which is, as I said, something which I think should be a non-partisan approach –

to maximise local jobs and business opportunities, our members are increasingly concerned that the scheme, and the proposed changes, is likely to create more burden than benefit for many small and medium builders. We are also concerned that some of the requirements are not possible to comply with in areas or regions with smaller, transient, and less diverse workforces.

So a great idea, but clearly from the Master Builders' perspective, their assertion is that the government actually has not considered this to its fullest. The Master Builders go on to say:

It is also deeply disappointing that genuine industry consultation on these reforms has been so limited.

There we have it: at a principles level, great; at a practical level, terrible. Why? Because the government come into this place having gesticulated amongst themselves in their ivory towers, far



removed from the realities that the Master Builders and their members are operating in, proposing legislation that practically will not help, and will cause greater issues and may not be achievable.

It says something, I think, about a government when, after a decade, the feedback from stakeholders, well-respected and well-regarded stakeholders, like Master Builders Victoria, is ‘At a principles level this is hunky-dory. We agree with this, but government, do better. You could have done this in a better way.’ That is something which the member for Kew in her contribution on Tuesday made a point on and which I wholeheartedly agree with. The government in this instance, in our view, has not made the case for change when it comes to this bill. They have not provided case studies or examples of businesses flouting what they assert is noncompliance. They have not made the case that projects are consistently departing from their local content requirements, that local apprentices are being denied work on government sites or that local subcontractors are missing out on government work. They have not made the case that there is one example which they can draw upon or point to where the current framework has failed. At an aspirational level, terrific, Local Jobs First sounds amazing, and we agree. But the reality is that they have not made the case that people are flouting the rules at the minute.

I continue to have a great interest in our state’s economic potential. Let us have a frank conversation. If this government truly valued the opportunity to create opportunity and economic opportunity in this state, then riddle me this: why would this government simply sit idly by and accept that 60 new or increased taxes is the way to strengthen an economy? You cannot tax your way back to prosperity, and this government has put the absolute go-slows on economic opportunity in this state. They have put the go-slows on the private sector creating the wealth and the opportunity for Victorians.

If the government’s strategy is simply to rely upon the public sector to create that wealth and to create that opportunity, we know, because we have seen it before, that that is a very short-term solution – in fact it is not a solution at all. We support the work of the Local Jobs First program in promoting local industry development within government projects. It is entirely appropriate that government-funded projects, wherever possible, incentivise local job creation and local businesses. It is also appropriate that government-funded projects support our apprentices and trainees with opportunities to learn their trade with on-the-job experience. But this bill is not about whether or not we support the Local Jobs First program; this bill is about whether we support punitive action being taken against businesses who are not able to meet their industry development targets.

Again, you cannot tax your way to prosperity, and this is what this Labor government over the last 10, almost 11, years has supported and has promoted. They have created an economic mess in this state. They think that their way of getting out of it is to tax Victorians more. What they are actually doing is denying Victorians the opportunity to live their best lives independent of reliance upon government. That is the reality.

This policy is in many respects tinkering around the edges. It is actually making things harder for Victorian industry and harder for Victoria’s private sector rather than easier. That is the feedback that the state’s alternative government have had from our engagement with stakeholders. We encourage the government – unlike what the master builders have said, and that is, ‘We regret the lack of deep consultation we have had with the government on this matter’ – to use the time between this bill being considered in this place and the other place to better engage with stakeholders on these issues. We get that we can be doing better, but the way that the government has proposed we do better will only be punitive and will only impact the private sector to a point where the aspiration of this bill to create local jobs will not actually eventuate.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (12:15): I rise today with great pleasure to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. I do want to commence by just stating for the record that I listened intently to the member for Pascoe Vale’s contribution, and I thought he spoke quite eloquently on this bill, despite the aspersions cast by the member for Sandringham. No one can doubt the member for Pascoe Vale’s absolute passion for jobs. In fact no one can doubt the passion of anyone on this side of the chamber for the value of decent pay for decent work. It is literally the underpinning foundation of

the proud labour movement around the world. That is why we are here, that is what we stand for and that is why we bring this bill before the house today.

This bill is about putting our state of Victoria first. It is about putting workers and businesses and our future first, because we do understand the importance of prioritising local jobs and ensuring the benefits to communities from large government projects. The member for Sandringham has just left, which is a bit of a shame, because I did want to mention it in terms of the strength of our economy. I think we should just put that on the record. I am sure some of my colleagues have probably done this, and I may have missed that. For the purposes of today, 870,000 jobs have been created since we were elected. That is an astonishing figure, and that goes up to 17 July – what an extraordinary number. It does not happen by accident; often it happens by design. I think we can be quite proud of our achievements here. That is why, as I say, we are bringing this bill before the house, because we cannot just rest on our laurels; there is always more to be done.

For over 20 years, the Local Jobs First Act 2003 has been a cornerstone of our efforts to promote employment growth and expand market opportunities for Victorian businesses. It has actually supported over 60,000 local jobs and has been applied to 396 strategic projects worth \$190 billion, including across my beautiful district of Monbulk. Sometimes it can be easy when you hear those big figures, when you speak about numbers in that quantity, to forget that behind each number is a person. and behind each person is often a family. They rely upon those jobs, and we are very, very proud that we play quite a significant part in ensuring that they get them.

It is unsurprising that the act, known originally as the Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003, was delivered under the Bracks government. We are just continuing to strengthen it here today. You can contrast our actions and legislation with the four years of the Baillieu–Napthine governments when the grand total of eight – I will say that one more time: eight – projects were declared strategic.

**Paul Edbrooke:** 80.

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** No. The member for Frankston may have misheard. He thought I may have said 80. Eight – count them on two hands. They only declared eight to be strategic, with mandatory local content set – how utterly shameful.

When I think about my area, we have the amazing Belgrave car park. It is not even two years old yet. This has been one of the strategic projects. I met with several workers on that project several times, and it was evident that it provided many, many benefits to the local economy through its construction, let alone the benefits we now continue to enjoy as commuters. People coming to visit Puffing Billy have a place to park without taking up the back car park and upsetting the local businesses there. It is a great modern car park with incredible accessible car spaces and EV chargers as well, so one of the few places across the hills where you can charge your car. Knowing that local businesses and workers directly benefited from participating in the construction of this great project warms the heart. It adds to the long-term benefit, because at the time it created jobs and it stimulated local businesses as well.

Another strategic project which is upcoming in the district of Monbulk is the Cardinia Reservoir safety upgrade. The reservoir was constructed between 1970 and 1973 to the best standards of its time, of course, but since then, a good 50-odd years later, as one would hope, dam design standards have improved. This proposed upgrade is going to ensure that the reservoir complies with best practice dam safety management standards. It is not a little job; it is a very large project. Through our legislation supporting local jobs, through this very act that we are seeking to amend today with the bill, all consultants are required to preference solutions that maximise the use of local materials, finishes, products, goods and services in construction, including fittings, fixtures and equipment and modern methods of construction wherever possible. The minimal local content – here is another number – for this project is 96 per cent. That is a superb figure if ever I heard one.

Our Local Jobs First Act has promoted employment growth and encouraged industry development, but of course there is always more to do, and this bill is the next step to ensure that money invested

stays here, unlike those opposite who made sure that when they sold off our utilities, the SEC, all those profits over time went overseas. That is disgraceful. We are about keeping it here, because we understand that if you want a strong local economy you have to encourage investment into the local economy and not allow companies and businesses to put their profits and their interests above all else and just send it off overseas.

This bill introduces critical reforms to enhance the powers of the Local Jobs First commissioner, ensuring stronger compliance and enforcement measures. Suppliers will now be required to meet their commitments to local content, jobs and the Major Projects Skills Guarantee, which mandates that at least 10 per cent of labour hours on large projects are completed by apprentices, trainees or cadets. When I was back in the union in 2013 the 2012 review was underway of the modern awards system, and one of them was the adult apprentices case. It was a major case. I was not the industrial officer on it – my dear friend and colleague Ms Jane Willey was – but I remember sitting there with her going over it and really understanding the impact that it has made. We need apprentices to have good jobs; we need them to have great opportunities. They are our future tradespeople. Without a good pipeline of apprentices coming through, we are all in big trouble down the track when there is no-one there to build anything or fix the electrics or the plumbing, all the fun things out there that I have absolutely no skill in achieving myself. We need our apprentices skilled up. Ensuring that there is that local component in these strategic projects makes sure that there is stability there for apprentices. It is fundamentally vital for all of us.

The measures that we are introducing in this bill resolve ambiguities in the current act and ensure that Victorian workers and businesses are prioritised, and the commissioner's powers will be expanded to include site inspections, investigations and reporting on compliance. Suppliers who fail to meet their commitments will face consequences, including deprioritisation for future government tenders, financial penalties or conditional payments tied to local content deliverables, and rightly so. What is the point of having requirements if there is nothing there to ensure that they are being adhered to? If we require something of someone, there has to be a way to ensure that we enforce compliance if they cease to do what is required of them. So it only makes sense, and it is not a blacklist but a mechanism to disincentivise noncompliance and provide agencies with information on poor past performance. It is a bit of clarity there for everyone involved to be able to see exactly what the situation has been.

This bill also introduces a new power for the minister to set requirements for locally produced uniforms and PPE on strategic projects, and this reinforces our commitment to supporting Victoria's textile, clothing and footwear industries. I think that is also incredibly important. We see our federal government has also got the priority of ensuring that we increase our local manufacturing. Never was it more apparent than during COVID how important having sovereign capability is for those things, and in order for that to always be around you need to ensure that we are supporting local manufacturing too, so this requirement for PPE to be more local is a great way to ensure a pipeline of work there.

We are expanding opportunities for Aboriginal and regional businesses, ensuring equitable participation in Local Jobs First projects, and by encouraging the use of local content at every stage of a project and promoting Australian standards we are reducing barriers for small and medium-sized enterprises and fostering regional economic development. There are two projects – outside of my area, but I think they are worth highlighting. The Paula Fox Melanoma and Cancer Centre achieved 90.7 per cent of local content and exceeded the Major Project Skills Guarantee with 11.41 per cent, and the Geelong Arts Centre redevelopment achieved 93.4 per cent local content and exceeded the skills guarantee. The local member for Geelong is very pleased about that fact indeed, as are we all because these projects demonstrate tangible benefits of prioritising local businesses and workers.

Once again I come back to the fundamental principles which underpin the labour movement around the world. It is decent pay for decent work, and wherever we can we will pull the levers of government to ensure that that is what Victorians can expect here. They should expect nothing less of us, and I am fundamentally proud that is what we continue to do every day as the government in this wonderful state of Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (12:26): Unfortunately I am not thrilled. I know – what a surprise. After three days of debating this bill on local jobs when we should be debating a very important bill on the VicGrid legislation that farmers have been protesting on the front steps about on numerous occasions. If this government professes to care so much about local jobs, let us talk about strengthening local jobs in the regions, which are supported by which industry? The agriculture industry – and not only in terms of those that work the land but the apprentices that they employ. My husband has got an apprentice in the workshop. There are apprentices in mechanics; there are apprenticeships and traineeships all throughout the ag sector, not to mention the generational farmers that work the land. They are the local jobs that matter to regional Victorians, and the fact that we cannot move on from this bill on the third day that it is being debated – we all agree with local jobs, but three days debating a bill that we actually do not oppose when we are being stopped from debating a bill that clearly regional –

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** They are afraid. Clearly regional communities oppose these draconian laws that will allow VicGrid employees to enter land. Let me give you a scenario: if there is –

**Paul Edbrooke:** On a point of order, Acting Speaking, can you please bring the speaker on her feet back to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I would ask the member for Mildura to come back to the bill, please.

**Jade BENHAM:** Of course they are going to want to come back to the bill and not speak about a bill that is on the business program later in the day, because they are afraid to. Clearly they are filibustering all day so that we do not get to the extraordinarily long list of people that want to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 that goes towards the safety of regional communities as well. I have had people that are employed on farms – if we are talking about local jobs, we are –

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** I am talking about local jobs – local jobs in the regions and the ones that actually matter to them. On farms, which can be terribly isolating, the fact that mothers can be home with their children, sometimes for weeks on end, particularly during harvest, and people that are unauthorised and unwelcome are able to enter that farmland when they are already there alone is frightening. It is frightening, because they have people working in local jobs, on projects, on farms –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this does not seem to have anything to do with the bill but rather a completely different bill that is not before the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I remind the member for Mildura to debate the bill that is currently before the house.

**Jade BENHAM:** Sure. I am talking about local jobs in the regions, and I understand that those on the other side do not want to talk about local jobs in the regions. This government will pat themselves on the back for mandating locally made PPE on a rail project in the city, but at the same time they are making it harder and harder for our farmers to grow food, run livestock and export their produce. Let us talk about this job: they will demand Australian-made uniforms while slapping red tape, land grabs and unworkable energy infrastructure all over prime agricultural land, but well done for supporting Australian-made and locally made PPE on government worksites.

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, please bring the member back to this bill.

**Jess Wilson:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Mildura is being entirely relevant about the bill. She was talking about local content and giving a prime example of where it is not the case.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I ask the member for Mildura to come to the bill before the house.

**Jade BENHAM:** Sorry, Acting Speaker, I actually thought this was entirely about the bill when we were talking about locally made PPE. Government infrastructure projects are entirely relevant to this bill. The fact that I am pointing out some facts in other areas I know is a little bit scary for those on the other side and they do not want to talk about it – that has been made obvious by debating this bill for three days in a row now – but this is entirely relevant. In Mildura and across Mallee the farming and agriculture sector is the backbone of that economy, and government-supported projects and government infrastructure projects now are threatening generational farms – and not just farms but also transport, logistics, food manufacturing and regional exporters. They are local jobs. Local infrastructure projects – government work sites – are going through private land. See where the grey areas are here and why regional communities are so upset? So this is entirely relevant to this bill. Let me give you an example. The horticulture sector in Sunraysia alone contributes \$1 billion annually. It employs thousands of people, including, like I said, local apprentices and trainees. And yet when growers are crying out against government projects that come through that land, this government does not want to talk about it. To say that it is not relevant and that these bills do not cross over is an absolute insult to those that have had to come to the front steps of Parliament week after week to try to be heard. It is very clear that those on the other side have never heard the statement ‘Two ears, one mouth; use them in that order.’

**Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:31):** I thought the member for Mildura had a bit more in her – a bit more to go. I am indeed humbled to rise and speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. I think I will be the first speaker in the last 10 minutes who does touch on that bill, with respect.

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I think you did give it a bit of a touch on the way through, member for Mildura – a glancing blow. I have listened intently to this debate over the past little while, and what I have seen as a theme from those opposite is a talking down of Victoria as an economy. A crucial part of the economy, obviously, is jobs – they are the backbone of the economy. I will point out the member for Murray Plains. I was in the chair yesterday, and the member for Murray Plains made some really good points. As someone who is from the region, I think they were pragmatic points and well made. Apart from that, though, I have heard a number of members essentially talking Victoria down.

You do not have to go far to see that Victoria is on the up. Even released today was some Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicating that retail trade in Victoria is up 1.2 per cent this month and 5.8 per cent over the year, which is higher than the retail trade in Australia. That tells a story. It is far from me to be giving lessons to those opposite, but – without giving a history lesson – when we came to government in 2014 we inherited the highest unemployment rate on the mainland, and now the Victorian economy is growing. It has grown faster over the last decade than any other state, and the Victorian economy is 31 per cent larger than when we came to government in 2014. So let us compare that: the highest unemployment on the mainland in the nation in 2014, and the economy now is 31 per cent larger under this government. I do not think people across the aisle are spreading mistruths, I just think the data they have got at times is absolutely cherry-picked. In the year to June 2025 Victoria’s unemployment rate averaged 4.4 per cent, remaining below the prepandemic average of 5.5 per cent. That is another measure of how an economy performs.

This bill today reinforces where we should be. It is another foundation to work off, and I know from personal experience as the member for Frankston and from having seen the \$1.1 billion Frankston Hospital build, the largest hospital build outside of metropolitan Melbourne – and I say that only to exclude Footscray, because they slightly pip us at the post there – and from having seen 8000 workers on a job site in a day with local materials and with locally made PPE that it boosts our local economy.

To hear those opposite talking about the lack of business investment in Victoria is also another thing that, while it is not really in the confines of this bill, relates to this bill. Having just come from a meeting with a billion-dollar business that invests in Victoria and that has over 300 works at this stage and has expanded to more than double in 15 months, I hear different from businesses to those opposite.

I do agree with the opposition, though, and just wait – they are right when they say the government does not create jobs. Fair enough. The government creates the environment to make it fertile for businesses to create jobs. I get that in the most. But we have made that fertile ground for 113,000 businesses, added to our economy since June 2020, and for the creation of 651,600 jobs since September 2020.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I heard someone interject over there about other businesses – startups. As the member for Frankston, I do not see it much in Frankston, but as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer I meet with the CEOs of unicorns. For those out there, I am not talking about ponies with horns on their heads; I am talking about startups that have reached the billion-dollar revenue stage. Victoria is home to 3500 startups. They are scaling as we speak. Those unicorns add to that ecosystem, and it was worth around \$132 billion as of last year. That is huge. The economy is going strong, and to hear the opposition use this bill as an opportunity to talk down our economy is really undermining the fact that with the challenges we have had with COVID, we are coming through – we have progressed. We have got a plan and we are sticking to it, and it actually is working.

We have heard some people not telling mistruths but maybe misunderstandings about what this bill is about. I think you have just got to go back to the thought that jobs are the backbone of the economy. Anything we can do to ensure that we are creating fertile ground for jobs to be created is a good thing. You can use this bill as a force multiplier. What we are doing here is creating jobs off jobs essentially. We are making sure that we use local materials and local skills, making sure that there are groups that are not majority that get the chance to get the skills they need to get the jobs they want as well. But this is what a good government does, and this is not something that has just been catalysed in Victoria. We have used the lessons financially and economically from overseas to make sure this happens.

Someone yesterday on the opposition benches mentioned housing, and it is fine to talk about housing. It is another thing entirely to be able to produce housing. Houses take jobs. You need people who are qualified and plenty of them to build the houses that we need in Victoria and the houses that this government is supporting. For those who want to argue the point, I would ask the house, with your permission, Acting Speaker: how many new houses are approved for construction every single day in Victoria? Anyone got any ideas? How many?

*Members interjecting.*

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Got an answer here?

**Cindy McLeish:** On a point of order on relevance, Acting Speaker, the member knows that he is out of order with his question, and I ask you just to bring him back to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I will remind the member for Frankston to put his comments through the Chair.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I appreciate that and appreciate being brought back into order. It is something you should not have to do all the time, and I apologise for that.

But more than 153 new homes are approved for construction every day in Victoria. Now extrapolate that out into how many jobs that means, how many people it takes to build a house. I do not know. I am not even sure how many trades it takes – at least five or six trades, if not more – to fit out the whole structure. That is actually 9500 more than New South Wales in the year to May 2025.

The Victorian economy is something that I think we have taken our lessons on from overseas; we have picked what works, we have brought it into our economy.

The last thing I want to talk about is regional Victoria. We have the strongest representation of regional Victoria in our lower house and in the other place as well. Regional unemployment is at a low of 3.6 per cent in the three months to May this year. The Allan Labor government also has the lowest regional payroll tax in the country, just 1.2125 per cent, saving regional businesses an estimated \$2.5 billion. While I know that is not answering the questions of a lot of those regional members opposite, I think they should actually take that into account, that there are different levers that maybe they would not choose to use that this government has chosen to use to make sure we are the catalyst for jobs and we are the catalyst for growth. This bill goes a long way to making sure that in the future, jobs, like everything from the \$1.1 billion Frankston Hospital to the homes that will be built in almost each and every electorate, have skilled labourers that are using local skills, locally made product and locally made PPE. I think, as I said before, that is a force multiplier – jobs upon jobs, and it is something that people on this side of the house certainly support. I commend this bill to the house.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (12:41): I rise to speak about the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 before we go to lunch. From the outset I would like to underscore what we have said all along on this side of the house, that the coalition supports the work of the Local Jobs First program in promoting local industry development within government projects. In fact we believe it is appropriate that government-funded projects are incentivised to create local jobs and support local businesses. It is also a good thing that government-funded projects support our apprentices and trainees with opportunities to learn their trade with on-the-job experience. In fact I have just come into the Economy and Infrastructure Committee with you, Acting Speaker Mullahy, where we are at the moment about to embark, or we have started embarking, on this inquiry into student pathways into in-demand industries. We know that this is something that is really important. We know that we need to promote local jobs. We know that we want to create these pathways for our local students, particularly when there are workforce shortages in these in-demand industries. So it is something really important, Acting Speaker, as you well know, being on that same committee.

This bill, though, is not about whether or not the coalition support the Local Jobs First program. The issue at hand is, to quote Master Builders Victoria on this particular bill, who have said that this bill is ‘all stick and no carrot’. If we are talking about incentivising, incentivising is fantastic. But if it is all stick no carrot, if it is about punishing those that cannot meet these requirements, that is unfair on these businesses, and it is particularly unfair on small businesses who are not maybe able to meet these targets. This bill is about whether we support punishing businesses who are not able to meet their industry development targets. We already know it is hard enough to run a small business in Victoria. It was as early as 2021 that the *Australian Financial Review* named Victoria as the worst place to do business in Australia. What an indictment on those opposite, that they have burdened small businesses with tax after tax and red tape upon red tape to make it the worst place to do business in Australia. It is shame on them. And just today there are leaked documents from that side of the house, the Labor Party, where they are about to go to their conference where they deliberate on policy for Victorians. They are talking about this leaked document that has shown that there are more taxes that Victoria has to look forward to thanks to this Allan Labor government who has already killed and crippled small businesses in our state. Fancy your new Treasurer in fact meeting with stakeholders in property development and investment saying, ‘What’s your favourite tax?’ Talk about tone-deaf.

Land tax on side hustles – this is something that I have been speaking about in my community. It is absolutely an issue, and it is something that I have raised that Labor is –

**Michaela Settle**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, could you request the member speaks through the Chair rather than the camera.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy)**: There is no point of order.

**Nicole WERNER:** What can I say? There are people in our community wanting to hear from us. My social media is growing, and there are people that are wanting to hear us prosecute this message against the government. They might laugh on that side of the house. They might laugh that Victorians are now having to pay the most taxes in all of Australia. They might laugh and they might jest about the fact that we are paying, in interest alone, \$1.2 million every single hour in this state, unlike any other state. They might laugh and they might find that amusing, but Victorians do not find that amusing. Victorians do not find it amusing that you have bankrupted this state. Victorians do not find it amusing that they have small businesses they are having to sell because they cannot afford the taxes that you have put on these small businesses that are crippling them.

Back to what I was saying – I got a bit fiery in that moment because I am here fighting for my community, because I am here fighting for the small businesses in my electorate, the small business owners in my electorate that speak to me day in, day out about the burden of taxes that this government has put upon them, about how they are struggling to make ends meet and they are needing to sell their small businesses because of the taxes that have been put upon them, only to find out today through this leaked document that shows that Labor is wanting to put even more taxes upon Victorian people because of the way they have bankrupted our state.

I got a few comments from people within my community who have written to me. This is Dave:

I'm paying land tax of nearly \$2500. I have a home business ... small mechanic business, just myself. Nearly all my profit is going to pay land tax.

Simon wrote to me and said:

My bill went from \$9000 to \$21,000 for land tax. This is extortion not tax ... You cannot have a business in Victoria as they will tax you out of existence ...

Ken from my community wrote to me. He says his business land tax was \$12,500 in 2015 and now in 2025 it is \$203,000. He said that they need 'approx \$1 million in sales just to pay land tax'. Ruth from my community wrote to me and said it is:

\$1800 from land tax. Mum n Dad investor having to pay off over time. This is for our retirement!

This is the matter at hand: this is a hypocritical bill. This is a hypocritical bill from those opposite, who are pretending to promote local jobs whilst in the same breath, crippling and doing everything they can to shut down small businesses in Victoria. I hear from people in my electorate all the time about how this government's taxes are killing their small businesses. On the land tax that we have just been prosecuting, they have reduced the threshold for land tax. Here in Victoria, if you have a side hustle, if you are a hairdresser, if you are a personal trainer, if you are someone that has a start-up from your home because with the cost-of-living crisis you thought, 'Maybe I'll try and make ends meet by having some other business so that I can try and cover my bills. I can try and cover my kids' school fees or uniforms' or whatever it is, this affects you. There are people that are really stretching themselves and going the extra mile to work extra jobs, work extra hours so that they can make ends meet in this cost-of-living crisis, and our heart goes out to them. In March last year the threshold for land tax was lowered. If you do a side hustle in your house and you earn over \$30,000, if you use a portion of your house and that is valued at \$50,000 – it was previously \$300,000 – you now have to pay land tax. Every side hustle, every personal trainer, every hairdresser is going to be stung by this Labor government that has squandered Victorian taxpayers money and is trying to make up for it by taxing ordinary Victorians who are just trying to make ends meet. That is what this land tax has done. These are the examples that I have from within my community.

We have the WorkSafe premium increases, land tax, payroll taxes, and now, to add insult to injury, there is a punishment for you if you cannot meet this industry development target in this bill that is at hand.

And in meeting these targets industry stakeholders have told us that where local requirements are able to be met they are generally being met across the industry – we know this. When they are unable to



me be it is typically because they are unable to be met because of workforce shortages or access, and we know this to be real because I hear it from my community all the time. You speak to any tradie in the electorate, you speak to any tradie in any part of Victoria, and they will say to you that you cannot find a roof tiler for love or money. You cannot find specific workforce labour for different industries because there is a shortage, because there are not enough people. So if there is a small business that is trying to run this and now they are going to be penalised, they are going to be punished, because they cannot find, say, a roof tiler because they are just not out there, how is that fair on the small business person who is just trying to run their small business? That is why we have moved a reasoned amendment, and that is all from me.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:51): Just to give a little bit of history as to the origins, we know that when we are looking at the amendments being made today, the Local Jobs First Act 2003, formerly known as the Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003, was delivered under the Bracks Labor government and is focused on promoting employment growth by expanding market opportunities for local industry and encouraging industry development. The act is Australia's longest standing industry participation legislation and has been supporting Victorian businesses and workers for over 20 years. So that brings us to where we are now and the amendments that are before the Parliament, the rationale behind them. As an overview, the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 delivers on our 2022 election commitment. We were not shy about broadcasting the changes that we are bringing before the Parliament today, let us just be clear, in spite of the strong opposition to us fostering jobs et cetera locally, which is sort of the rhetoric that we were getting. They certainly are not supporters of free TAFE, because if you want to train people to fill jobs then surely free TAFE is one of those mechanisms – again, something that the opposition are not exactly fans of themselves. They want a bit of something and a bit of the other, a bit of that cherrypicking, but there needs to be –

**A member** interjected.

**Nina TAYLOR**: Well, imagine a bit of a logical line there when it comes from the training to the delivery. There is more, and I am going to speak to that in a moment. The commitment is to strengthen the Local Jobs First Act 2003 by enhancing the powers of the Local Jobs First commissioner, unlocking opportunities for Victorian jobs and businesses on Victorian government projects and clarifying local content requirements that meet contemporary expectations. Arguably since 2003 there have been many changes over time with industry, the economy et cetera, hence we are adapting to current needs. Just to reiterate, we are delivering on our 2022 election commitment, so this surprise and startling shock and horror from the opposition falls a little short, because it is not like we have not been transparent with what we are bringing forward. Firstly, these commitments include a commitment to clarify in the act that individual commitments in local industry development plans are enforceable by the commissioner. Surely if anything is to have credibility it is important to show the extent of the enforceability of a particular legislative frame. I get that the opposition are wildly opposed to this, but there is a logic behind this, ensuring that the act actually does have the requisite rigour in the contemporary world. I will not list all the changes, but I am just speaking to some of them – instead of this embellished and heightened shock and horror from the opposition – to bring it down to what the bill is delivering.

The amendments in the bill clarify that suppliers are required to comply with their commitments to local content jobs and the Major Project Skills Guarantee, where at least 10 per cent of labour hours on large projects are completed by apprentices, trainees or cadets. This led me to think about a local project in my area, the Melbourne arts precinct transformation, and indeed more apprentices, cadets and construction workers are kickstarting their careers with hands-on training on the Melbourne arts precinct transformation, where construction is forging ahead. I have literally seen that because I live in Southbank and I get to see piece by piece this magnificent project, a \$1.7 billion investment, with – from carpentry and demolition and electrical to flooring, fire services and project management – more than 11,000 new jobs.

Did you hear that? 11,000 new jobs are being created during construction on Australia's biggest cultural infrastructure project. I do not know if those opposite are snubbing their nose at that. Do they think that that is not valuable? Because guess what, I know that this project has to comply with the Major Projects Skills Guarantee, and this is therefore providing those very opportunities in terms of apprentices and cadetships that I think Victorians do want to see, arguably. And it is local, so that is really fantastic. I mean, Melbourne is the arts capital –

**A member** interjected.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes, well, it is, and when we are looking at major events, where do people come? They come to our fantastic city of Melbourne. I know those opposite hate Victoria and think it is a terrible place to live. They are always trashing it and talking it down. I actually think it is a pretty fantastic state. I think we have magnificent businesses, private and also public investment as well. And actually you do have to invest in your state to deliver, and that is exactly what we are doing.

There are also some really fantastic accessibility elements with the upgrades to the State Theatre. I am just pointing this out: when you look at those 11,000 jobs, what are they delivering for the state? It is actually going to mean that people of all abilities will be able to have much greater access to seeing the arts firsthand, and this is giving them the dignity and the respect that they deserve. It is also helping backstage because we know with modern sets et cetera that it is facilitating those very mechanical elements. Victoria is the arts capital, and we have major events here and beautiful productions, but they need to be supported, and there are jobs behind the stage as well as on the stage that are being helped in that way as well. Of course there is The Fox: NGV Contemporary, which is a real game changer as well. So I just wanted to point out why it is so important on the one hand, yes, to invest in our state and invest in what Victorians want to see, but you can see the importance and the relevance of the local jobs requirements and the Major Projects Skills Guarantee, ensuring that we are fostering and training up young Victorians so that they can have careers that start now but will sustain into the future.

I think it is also important, because there has been much mentioned about regional areas, that I just point out very briefly that further amendments within this bill include increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and regional businesses. Those opposite have talked a lot about the regions – totally fair enough. Perhaps they are not privy to all the elements of this bill. It might be worth, instead of just scoffing at it, having a good look and seeing the rationale behind the changes that are being made. Often I do get a little bit shocked when we think of the number of members on our side of the fence that live in the regions. It is funny, this strange demarcation those opposite try to make when in fact we have people, many fine members, on this side who live in the regions too. And guess what, they are darn passionate about their local communities, and they have their say when it comes to these really important consultative changes. We are delivering on election commitments. I know I am being a little bit repetitive on that point, but I think the shock and horror being demonstrated by those opposite is a little bit galling, to say the least. There are no surprises here.

I think we should also have confidence in what has been delivered to date to show what can be continued into the future. Between its introduction in 2016 and 30 March 2025 the Major Projects Skills Guarantee just for instance, just putting it out there, has been applied to 480 projects employing 19,197 apprentices, trainees and cadets. A total of 27.7 million hours for apprentices, trainees and cadets has been committed, of which 21.9 million hours have been worked, just to be precise on this point, because we are going to have a credible argument here. I am happy to be pulled down to the point of exactly what at a granular level is being delivered.

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

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Early childhood education and care**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. In 2021 Victoria Police advised the department of justice that Ronald Marks was arrested and under investigation for accessing child sexual abuse material. Despite this warning, Ronald Marks continued to hold a valid working with children check and attended childcare centres and kindergartens for the next four years. Earlier this month, Ronald Marks was convicted of accessing almost 1000 images of child sex abuse material. If the Ombudsman's recommendations had been adopted three years ago, Ronald Marks's working with children check could have been rescinded. Why did the government fail to immediately adopt the Ombudsman's recommendations in 2022, instead leaving this loophole to be exploited and children to be put at risk?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question on that specific case, he refers to matters that date back to 2021, and I am not going to comment on those matters concerning that particular individual. But what I will say, in terms of understanding the system, is that the child safety system does need to be strengthened, which is why in April of this year I directed the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services to undertake a review of the working with children check settings, acknowledging that this was work that needed to be done. And as the Premier today, I gave that direction to the minister and the Attorney-General. They have done that work with urgency, which is why this week the Worker Screening Regulations have been strengthened.

**Bridget Vallence**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the question relates to recommendations by the Ombudsman three years ago, and I would ask you, on relevance, to get the Premier to come back to that question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The Premier is being relevant to the question asked. I cannot dictate to the Premier how to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I was going exactly to the point that was raised by the Leader of the Opposition. It went to recognising as Premier that we did need to strengthen the system, which is why in April I directed the Attorney-General and the Minister for Government Services to undertake urgent work, and that work has resulted this week in the Worker Screening Regulations being strengthened, which does see the capacity for the worker screening unit to be able to revoke a working with children check should there be advice that comes to that unit that an individual has been found by other regulatory agencies to have committed an offence.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): In relation to the regulations that the Premier has just referred to, will this implement the Ombudsman's recommendations in full?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): In regard to that Ombudsman's report, I have outlined to the house the work that is already underway to –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN**: There has already been, and I will step it through. There are three parts –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN**: The Minister for Children went to this matter a number of weeks ago and outlined that there has been work by her department in responding to the parts of that Ombudsman's report that needed to be actioned.

**Brad Battin**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, in relation to relevance, the question was very simple: will this make sure that the Ombudsman's recommendations are put in place in full? The answer is either a yes or a no on what they will deliver.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Mordialloc – half an hour.

**Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am endeavouring to answer directly the question put by the Leader of the Opposition. It is impossible to provide that level of detail to the house with the interruptions from the Leader of the Opposition. I would hope there would be the opportunity for me to provide that information, because I know it is important for parents to hear this information.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the point of order, the Premier was being relevant in discussing the regulations. I cannot dictate how a minister or Premier responds to a question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will be brief because of the time that is available. The Minister for Children has worked on the relevant recommendations for her department. We have moved already with the worker screening recommendations that have been implemented this week, and yes, there is more work to be done. We have been clear on that. That is why we have commissioned the urgent review, and we will work very hard when that review is received by government.

#### **Ministers statements: health system**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): Only Labor governments invest in our health and hospital system across the state, and only Liberal and National governments cut and close them. We are investing \$15 billion to build the hospitals Victorians need and deserve so they can access that world-class health care we have in this state regardless of where they live.

We know that work is underway on that fabulous new Melton hospital, that beautiful new Melton hospital that is going to bring world-class care to one of our fastest growing communities. And, you know what, when you build a hospital you also need to staff the hospital, and there will be 4000 people working at the Melton hospital when it opens.

In Footscray you cannot miss that big beautiful hospital that has been built in Footscray. In Barwon Heads there are cranes on the skyline building a new women's and children's hospital. As the member for Frankston also knows –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Oh, he is down there on the worksite inspecting the redevelopment of the Frankston Hospital. One of the best days in this job – and every day is a great day – was joining the member for Ripon at the opening of that wonderful Maryborough hospital, which is really transforming health care for that great community. Of course the member for South-West Coast knows there are building works at Warrnambool. There are building works in Swan Hill as well. As I said, not only are we building the infrastructure, we are staffing the hospitals as well – more healthcare workers delivering that great world-class health care that Victorians know they can rely on here in Victoria.

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

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday I asked if the Premier has full confidence in the government's childcare regulator. The Premier affirmed twice that she could understand why the question was asked, twice that parents are asking the same question and twice that it was a legitimate question. Despite this, the Premier failed to answer the question. I ask again –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Members at the table, refrain please. Member for Kew to repeat her question.

**Jess WILSON:** My question is to the Premier. Yesterday I asked if the Premier has full confidence in her government's childcare regulator. The Premier affirmed twice that she could understand why the question was asked, twice that parents are asking the same question and twice that it was a legitimate question. Despite this, the Premier failed to answer the question. I ask again: does the Premier have full confidence in her government's childcare regulator?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): In answering the question from the member for Kew, I say that this is something that will be in terms of working to strengthen the system. As I have said before, if there are changes that need to be made, as recommended by the urgent review, we stand ready to make them to keep children safe. If that includes recommendations that may intersect with the work of the regulator, then we will also make them, because it is important that we have confidence in the system. I say this about the work of the regulator: it is a very, very big and challenging role that they have, and I thank the staff in the regulator, as I thank the staff across the early childhood and childcare system, who are also finding this an incredibly difficult time in terms of the horrific abuse allegations. But I do want to be clear: if there is more work to be done to build confidence, we will do it.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order on relevance, Deputy Speaker, the question was about the Premier having confidence in the regulator. I would ask you to ask her to come back to that question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier has finished her answer.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:12): The Premier has refused to include the performance of the regulator in the review. Will the Premier commit to establishing an independent regulatory watchdog to protect children?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): The answer to that question goes to comments I have made in this place a number of times this week. As a result of the urgent review being undertaken by Jay Weatherill and Pam White, if they recommend that there are more changes to be made, we stand ready to make them, and it does go to the matters that have been raised by the member for Kew.

### Ministers statements: energy policy

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:13): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on how our 100 neighbourhood batteries program is driving down power bills, slashing emissions and putting power back in the hands of the people. We are delivering on that. Ninety neighbourhood batteries are already in place or on their way, like the Phillip Island battery, to store more cheap solar energy, which I know the member for Bass is very excited about; the Mata Chintapurni Mandir temple in St Albans, estimated to be able to put \$17,000 in energy savings towards free meals for the wider community; batteries for social housing to lower power bills by around \$200 every year in the electorates of Preston, Oakleigh, Geelong and Pascoe Vale; batteries for the regions to provide backup power at community hubs, which locals in the electorates of Wendouree, Macedon and Bendigo West will all benefit from; batteries at Salvation Army food banks and shelters, expected to create around \$790,000 in energy savings and additional income to frontline services that are run by the Salvos in Eureka, Ripon, Dandenong, Lara, Kalkallo, Bayswater, Etham Park and Box Hill. And that is not all. Round 3 is now open for new applications for more batteries in more neighbourhoods.

We are getting on with rolling out cheap, reliable renewables and storage, helping put power back in the hands of Victorians. Meanwhile those opposite will scrap net zero, will sell off the SEC, will stop new renewable energy projects and will frack Victoria, pushing up energy bills for every Victorian, whereas I say to every Victorian: the Allan Labor government is on your side every day.

**Early childcare education and care**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:15): My question is to the Premier. The Minister for Children has overseen inquiries into the deaths of 45 children who have been known to child protection; 190 reports of child sexual exploitation; 600 major abuse incidents in just six months; a four-month vacancy in the children's commissioner's role; the commissioner's failure to refer Joshua Brown's case to the working with children check system; and substantiated complaints against Brown, who was later charged with 73 child abuse offences after working in 24 centres, after a warning from the commissioner that abuse investigations would stall without more funding. Does the Premier stand by her comments that this is a minister of the 'highest quality'?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): The answer is yes, and I will detail again, for the benefit of the member for South-West Coast and the entire house, the reasons why. Part of the reason why I have complete confidence in the Minister for Children is not only because of what I said yesterday about the minister being of the highest integrity, the hardest working minister, the minister who every night takes home briefs that anyone who has worked in this sector knows are the hardest of briefs in government to read, because every day she is dealing with some of the worst of our society and how they treat children. I not only respect the work of the Minister for Children but admire her, because she is not just deeply committed to protecting the children today but working damn hard on policies and reform for the system of the future.

We know that the work of protecting children should never rest, that there are evil agents in our community who look for vulnerabilities in systems to prey on the most vulnerable. We have seen reports coming out of Sydney today. We saw reports coming out of, I think it was, Queensland a couple of days ago. We have seen reports where, as I said, there are evil people who seek the vulnerable people in vulnerable systems. They seek the vulnerable points, I should say, in systems and act in the worst of ways. Individuals like the minister –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the commissioner for children and youth warned of dire warnings two years ago. I would ask you to ask the Premier –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I could not hear the point of order.

**Bridget Vallence:** Deputy Speaker, the Commissioner for Children and Young People made dire warnings two years ago. On relevance, I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to this very question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I think the point of order was on relevance. It was very hard to hear, as per yesterday; so far, we have been better. I do not uphold the point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was saying, in terms of the work of our government's Minister for Children, it is dedicated to the task of keeping children safe in working with those who are in the child protection system, who are across the foster care system – kids in school settings, in early childhood settings, who, can I say, need someone like the Minister for Children on their side. And questions like those from the member for South-West Coast – the content of that question – demonstrate very clearly the contrast between the work and the dedication and the integrity of the Minister for Children and those opposite. Riven by bitter division, they reflect on the Minister for Children.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:21): Did the Premier or your budget and finance committee receive a request from the Minister for Children for additional funding for the commissioner for children?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I would remind members that 'you' refers to the Chair.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the first question asked by the member on her feet was in relation to whether or not the Premier had confidence in her Minister for Children.

The supplementary question was in relation to budget decisions. I fail to see how the supplementary question is related to the first question. I ask that you call the supplementary question out of order.

**Bridget Vallence:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, there is an absolute link between both the substantive and the supplementary question, because it refers to the Minister for Children and the Commissioner for Children and Young People. I would ask you to rule the Leader of the House's point of order out of order.

**Roma BRITNELL:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, one of the points made in the substantive question is a warning from the commissioner that abuse allegation investigations would stall without more funding. The supplementary refers to the additional funding.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will allow the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): I will say this about the Minister for Children: every conversation I have with the Minister for Children is about how we can do more, whether it is about delivering programs like free kinder for children around the state or how we can continue to strengthen the system to keep children safe. The Minister for Children –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Lowan can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Lowan withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** And I say this: the line of questioning again demonstrates why Victoria's vulnerable children need someone like the Minister for Children on their side, compared to the lack of integrity from those opposite.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, the question is about if a funding request has been made, and the Premier has gone nowhere near that question. I would ask you to ask her to come back to that, on relevance.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question referred to the Minister for Children and the commissioner for children. The Premier was being relevant. I cannot dictate, as we all know, to the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier has completed her answer.

#### **Ministers statements: economy**

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:24): I rise to update the house on the work underway to grow Victoria's future economy. Our great state is home to more than 3500 startups worth \$132 billion. These startups are taking big risks every day, building new products, creating new industries and changing the way we work and live. Last week at the LaunchVic Victorian Startup Gala I announced new funding of \$3.75 million to support every stage of our startup ecosystem, from venture capital funds and university-led programs to community events.

Victoria is also emerging as a prominent data centre hub in the region, with leading companies investing. I have had the absolute pleasure of visiting two NEXTDC data centres in recent months alongside my good friends the member for Sunbury, the member for Albert Park and of course our Premier, and we saw firsthand the transformative work Craig Scroggie is doing there. He has an incredible vision to build this infrastructure for a modern competitive economy. Data centres are to the 21st century what rail lines were to the 19th century – critical infrastructure that will have a profound impact on our future as a nation.

It is important we are also growing the state's tech talent pool, creating jobs, attracting investment and stimulating business growth. This is the third industrial revolution, and we want to ensure that the benefits are shared with women and diverse candidates, because when they win we all win. That is why last week, at the incredible Australian Information Industry Association awards, I announced the

expansion of the summer of cyber program, which will help more women and gender-diverse tertiary students and recent graduates gain job-ready skills while supporting Victorian businesses to improve their cyber capabilities.

Victoria has every good reason to be confident about our economic future. We have huge opportunities for us on the horizon, and on this side of the house we are relentlessly pursuing those opportunities each and every day to secure Victoria's future.

### **Middle East conflict**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:26): My question is for the Premier. On 17 October 2023 the Premier moved a motion carried by this chamber stating that this house stands with Israel. With estimates of those killed directly by Israel's attacks now passing 61,800 people, a number that does not include those buried under the rubble or dead from lack of food, water or medicine, is the Premier still content to stand with Israel, or is it now time for another motion, this time condemning Israel's genocide in Palestine?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): The member for Richmond refers to a motion that was considered by this house in the immediate aftermath of what was one of the most horrific terrorist attacks that we have seen in decades.

**Ben Carroll** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Thank you – as the Deputy Premier has reminded me, the biggest loss of Jewish life since World War II. It was entirely appropriate that this house stood with the people of Israel, the Jewish community and indeed all good people around the globe condemning that terrorist attack. It reflects quite poorly on the member for Richmond and her Greens political opponents to want to continue to use a conflict a long way from our shores to drive political division that is only causing ongoing distress to not just members of our Jewish community but people across the community. We can both equally condemn the terrorist invasion and say we stand with the people of Israel and our Jewish community. But as I said at the Israeli Independence Day event a few weeks ago, we can equally too be critical, as we saw the Zionist Federation of Australia today say that Israel does need to ensure aid is being delivered to those who are desperately needing that support in Gaza. It is incumbent upon those of us a long way from this conflict to ensure that we do nothing to drive further grief and distress and further division. What makes it even more contemptible is it is being done for political purposes. It is being done because of politics. I say we saw that the Australian population rejected that politics of division. They rejected it in Wills and they rejected it in Macnamara.

**Ben Carroll** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: And in Melbourne, thank you. They rejected it because what we have here in Victoria is something precious: a multicultural, multifaith community that should be supporting one another. The behaviour of the extremists at the front door of the National Gallery of Victoria on Sunday was not activism, it was antisemitism. But equally too we can say to the Israeli government, 'Please deliver aid.' We can stand with world leaders and say, 'Please make sure that we bring this conflict to an end.' I stand with the community here in Victoria. We all want this conflict to end and reject the politics of division.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:30): I absolutely agree that we should be doing nothing to drive further grief, and so that is why it was so disturbing when this week Senator Wong confirmed that Australia ships F-35 fighter jet parts directly to Israel so that they can bomb Palestine. Despite her concern for loss of life, in the past eight months the Premier has met seven times with weapons companies that supply Israel.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! I need to be able to hear the member for Richmond's question.



**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Reflecting on the Chair is not honourable. Frankston can leave for half an hour.

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI:** The minister has met seven times with weapons companies in the last eight months that supply Israel, and I can presume that it was not to beg them to stop, because the Victorian government supports these companies through contracts and funding programs and trade opportunities. So my question is: why is the Premier using taxpayers money to prop up a genocide, when we should do nothing to drive further grief?

**Will Fowles:** There are two elements to the point of order, Deputy Speaker. The first is that I am not sure in amongst all the ranting there that there was anything relating to government business. The second thing goes back to this test of what is a supplementary question. It is a three-part test as laid out in 55(1A) of the standing orders, namely that it has to ‘actually and accurately relate to the original question’ – that is the first element; secondly, must ‘relate to, or arise from, the answer’, not just the question; and, three, ‘must not be a separate question on the same topic’. I would submit that it fails all three parts of that test.

**Ellen Sandell:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the question did directly relate to the Premier’s answer – in fact it quoted from the Premier’s answer – and it directly relates to government business, because it is about the use of taxpayer funding for programs that are involved in Israel’s genocide in Gaza, which was directly the subject of the first question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** On the member for Ringwood’s point of order, I think government business is within the realm of taxpayer funds. I will allow the question to the Premier on the basis of its relation to the first question and her answer.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): In answering the question, if you could allow me to speculate for a moment, would the member for Richmond stand up and condemn the workers in my electorate who make the Bushmasters, who are keeping Ukrainians safe? Would the member for Richmond make that same comparison for those workers in Bendigo – proud workers, good workers? And in those meetings that the member for Richmond referred to –

**Ellen Sandell:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I understand that it is an uncomfortable question for the Premier, but the standing orders are very clear that question time cannot be used as a way to attack the member asking the question, and I ask you to bring her back to the question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier is allowed to have contrast and context in her answer, and I ask her to come back to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I say that because, yes, I did meet and I have met with representatives of the defence companies who employ people here in this state. One of the things one of those members said to me has stuck with me – that as a nation, if we are sending our young men and women off to protect our peace and democracy, it is incumbent upon us to make sure that they have the benefit of technology in terms of the equipment to protect their lives as they are protecting our freedoms and our rights in conflicts around the globe.

#### **Ministers statements: community safety**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:36): I want to firstly update the house that police were involved in a critical incident last night at Yarra Junction. These incidents, when they occur, are very distressing for everyone involved, and I want to place on record my thanks to those police members who responded and for the work that every police member does 24/7 to keep us safe. They are doing that

right now, and they often put themselves in harm's way to do so. Victorians are very grateful for the work that they do, and I want to thank them for the work that they did last night.

I would also like to update the house on our nation-leading machete ban. I was with the Premier down at the West Melbourne police station to look at the location and the design of our machete disposal bins, some 45 bins at 24-hour police stations across the state, part of a \$13 million investment that rolls out our community awareness campaign. We want to make sure that those surrender bins go live from 1 September through to 30 November. There are stiff penalties applied to keep those machetes. If you want to hang on to them, police will track you down – up to two years in prison, a \$47,000 fine. We want to choke the machete supply, and we have seen that through the interim ban and removal of machetes from our shelves. Amazon did a complete nationwide ban. We also want to thank the Minister for Consumer Affairs, my friend, who made sure of some 470 retail inspections, with only seven retailers not complying. There are some 5500 machetes not going interstate for sale that will be destroyed right here in Victoria. Young people have to drop the knife. They have to save a life. They have to change lives.

This machete ban also adds to increased tough powers that the Allan government has introduced: stop-and-search powers without a warrant. We have seen a record 14,000 edged weapons seized across Victoria by our police members. We will hit another record thanks to these tough new changes to the law here in Victoria. We will do whatever it takes, the Allan government, to back police and keep Victorians safe.

### Emergency services

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:38): My question is to the Minister for Emergency services. Have the CFA and SES been advised of their base funding for this financial year?

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:38): We have made it really clear in this place, when it comes to the emergency services budgets, when it comes to the organisations within our emergency services, that there have been no cuts. This is exactly the premise of the question that the member is asking, which is the erroneous claim, the mischievous claim, that there are cuts to these budgets when there are not.

**Danny O'Brien**: On a point of order on the question of debating, Deputy Speaker, I did not make any claims. I asked a question. Have they been given their budgets?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: The minister has had 24 seconds and was starting on funding, and I ask her to come back to the question.

**Vicki WARD**: I have completed my answer.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:40): We are now one month into the 2025–26 financial year. Every government department has been given a funding envelope, except our volunteer emergency services. Will the minister confirm that the reason she will not say what the CFA and SES budgets are is because they have been cut, despite Labor taxing Victorians another \$3 billion supposedly to support our emergency services?

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:40): The Premier has been very clear on this. The Treasurer has been clear on this. I have been clear on this. We have not only doubled our initial investment from when we first came into government; we have more than doubled what those opposite put in when they were last in government. And I will again say there are no cuts.

**Danny O'Brien**: On a point of order on the question of debating the issue, Deputy Speaker, this would be fixed very easily if the minister would just answer the question and give us a figure. Instead of just blindly denying that there is a cut, tell us what the figure is.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I will rule on the point of order in a moment. I would just like to take us back to 1933:

Although interjections are disorderly, it is the practice to permit interjections which elicit important information. However it is not permissible to interject for the purpose of elucidating a point which the member is making or to inject to prevent a member from making their speech.

Today has been better but not perfect. We can always be better. That was Blackburn in 1933. We are all learning. I was going to ask the minister to come back to the question; she has finished her answer.

### **Ministers statements: rural and regional roads**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:42): I have never met a pothole I did not want to fix, so it is a pleasure to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is doing exactly that, providing smoother and more reliable journeys. Over the past year crews have been out busy delivering our \$960 million program of road repairs right across the state. They have rebuilt and repaved hundreds of kilometres of roads, fixed thousands of potholes and slashed tens of thousands of kilometres of grass, as the member for Sunbury well knows.

We know that this is especially important to regional communities, which is why we have done 70 per cent of this work on the roads that they rely on every day. We have completely rebuilt parts of the Beaufort-Lexton Road in Ripon, the Korumburra-Inverloch Road in Bass, the Bacchus Marsh-Gisborne Road in Eureka and the Tilden-Woodend Road in Macedon. The member for South-West Coast is also pleased to know that I have been out on the roads in her electorate, taking her up on her longstanding invitation once again. I am disappointed she was not there, because she was probably sitting behind the keyboard bashing out letters while we have been out on the ground delivering, but I know she is very excited that we have done work in her community with sections of the Princes Highway, the Terang-Mortlake Road and the Mackinnons Bridge-Noorat road all rebuilt from the ground up.

But we are not done. We have delivered a record program and will be rolling out another one in spring, backed by a \$976 million investment from this government, the largest ever in a single year. We have got the cracks in our roads sorted, but as for the cracks in the Liberal Party, they are widening by the day.

### ***Constituency questions***

#### **Polwarth electorate**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:44): (1210) My question this afternoon is to the Minister for Agriculture, and the question I have for the minister is: when will the government begin to support the amazing work being done by the Need for Feed and Hay Runners and other charitable organisations who are relying incredibly on the generous support of interstate farmers and the local trucking and transport industries across Victoria and interstate? Farmers and towns in my communities of Polwarth have been most grateful for the ongoing support offered purely through philanthropic and generous donations from farmers and trucking groups right around the country, and yet this government has failed to offer any financial support or any subsidy to the donated fuel and truck time that is being used to bring much-needed food and feed to our desperate farmers in Polwarth.

#### **Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:46): (1211) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. What is the Victorian Labor government doing to support our grassroots sporting clubs, including our athletics community via the Coburg Harriers and Coburg Little Athletics club? Following a sustained local community grassroots campaign, I am delighted to report to the house that Merri-bek council have listened and since voted unanimously on 9 July to save, preserve and enhance the iconic Coburg athletics track and field precinct as part of the revised,

finalised North Coburg sports hub master plan. The presence of the longstanding Harold Stevens Athletics Track, accessed by over 15,000 people a year, will be maintained and assured for many years to come. I would like to give a huge thankyou to the Merri-bek City Council for listening and responding to the overwhelming views of so many local families, schools and community members who campaigned hard to save the track. A special thankyou to the entire Coburg athletics community for their advocacy: Peter Leahy, Michael Chadwick, David Woods and the hundreds of local families who got involved to launch and spread the word of the campaign, put up signs, letterboxed and signed the 1700-plus-signature petition. Commendations also to council for the other positive master plan outcomes for Coburg outdoor pool, table tennis club, Coburg footy club, East Coburg cricket club, Merri Creek and Edgars Creek groups.

### **Gippsland East electorate**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:47): (1212) My question is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the information that I am seeking is whether there are plans to revisit WorkCover premiums for commercial fishers. As background, I provide one example of a local operator from Lakes Entrance: his WorkCover premium in 2023–24 was \$4178; in 2023–24, it rose to \$13,057, an \$8878 increase. If that was not enough, in 2024–25 it went up another \$2617. But here comes the killer: in 2025–26 it is \$24,078, another increase of over \$8000 from the previous year. Now, that is a 476 per cent increase in four years. How are businesses like this meant to survive such increases? So I ask the minister if there are any plans to review the impact on commercial fishers and small businesses in general who cannot sustain these rises.

### **Tarneit electorate**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (14:48): (1213) My question is to the Minister for Education. How will the new schools and community spaces pilot program help unlock more community spaces in my electorate of Tarneit? I was excited to hear the minister announce \$1.4 million to fund a dedicated support team to facilitate community use of school spaces. Since I was elected in 2022 we have already built five brand new schools in Tarneit. These schools boast world-class facilities, including top-quality indoor and outdoor sporting grounds and purpose-built classroom spaces. These are fantastic public assets, and opening them up for the entire community helps ensure they are used to their fullest potential. The pilot program will help unlock more of these schools for after-school activities like sports, language and music classes and other community-run programs. Of the 41 schools participating in the pilot, seven are in my electorate: Tarneit Rise Primary School, Davis Creek Primary School, Karwan Primary School, Nearnung Primary School, Brinbeal Secondary College, Wimba Primary School and Barayip Primary School.

### **Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:49): (1214) My question is for the Premier. I ask: when will the Premier review management of the government-owned property in Prince Street, Hampton, and take action to ensure that our community is safe? Premier, the recent shooting in Hampton following an alleged drug deal gone wrong has proven that Hampton is not safe. The shooting follows a string of alleged violence from the same government-owned property; they include threats with weapons against innocent neighbours. We know that hundreds of police reports have been made about the location – hundreds – yet the government keeps putting the rights of one above the safety of the whole surrounding community. We need the government to act and take responsibility for their own property. The community recently met and were united with one message: everyone deserves to be safe from weapons, crime and stray bullets in their own streets. It is time for the government to act and make sure that Hampton, its community and the affected local residents are safe. I call on the government to confirm to me when they will do something.

**Lara electorate**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:50): (1215) My question is for the Minister for Education. The Victorian education system has some wonderful programs aimed at promoting leadership for students. How are students from the Lara electorate benefiting from these programs? I recently had a work experience student from Lara Secondary College, Anaiya, complete work experience in my office, and she has a strong passion for school leadership. She wrote this question for me today as she is keen to review these statistics to help her improve her school and the opportunities that students can partake in.

**Mornington electorate**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (14:50): (1216) My question is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment. What is the minister doing to support small businesses on the Mornington Peninsula, including in my electorate of Mornington? Recently we have had the heartbreaking closure of several beloved small businesses in the Mornington electorate. After more than 50 years serving our community, John Pugsley's Mornington village newsagency has closed its doors. Mickey Blue, a local clothing store of over 20 years, and Peter Young Shoes, a family business of 30 years, are also closing, leaving a number of empty shopfronts and concerned residents. Despite their amazing customer service and value to our community, our small business owners are drowning in red tape, planning fees and high taxes under this state Labor government. Levies, rental pressures and regulations consume precious time and resources. Victoria's small businesses deserve practical relief – cutting taxes and red tape and more. I call on the minister to resolve these issues.

**Box Hill electorate**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:52): (1217) My question is to the Premier. Late last week primary school students from Mount Scopus Memorial College in my electorate of Box Hill were targeted with vile antisemitic abuse during a visit to the Melbourne Museum. This follows a spate of similar incidents in recent months targeting Jewish businesses and places of worship and individual members of the Jewish community here in Melbourne. There is no place for this behaviour in our community, and this shameful antisemitic behaviour has got nothing to do with the conflict in the Middle East. Hate and division in Melbourne will not bring about a peaceful resolution to the war in Gaza nor ease the suffering of Palestinians. My question is: what actions are the government taking to curb antisemitism in Victoria?

**Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:52): (1218) My question is for the Minister for Health and comes from Joan at Sunraysia Information & Referral Service, a volunteer organisation that helps patients navigate their treatment journey and travel. This is one I have raised time and time again in this place, and it is: when will the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme get back to being an efficient service, prioritising patients and reimbursing forms in a timely manner? SIRS and Sunraysia Cancer Resources assist patients in Mildura to get the treatment they need, because they cannot get it locally. At the moment VPTAS have 210 forms from SIRS with a value of \$234,681.04. SCR are owed \$182,245.83. That is \$416,926.87, and it does not include forms lodged by individuals. When will VPTAS start prioritising patient reimbursements?

**Broadmeadows electorate**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (14:53): (1219) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education, and I ask: what are the next steps for the Glenroy College master plan? As part of the *Merri-Bek North Education Plan* \$50,000 was granted to fund a master plan for Glenroy College. I had the pleasure of attending a recent school council meeting where these fabulous new plans were presented, and they included a very exciting proposal for a leading-edge science, technology, engineering, arts and maths hub. I would like to thank the brilliant principal Andrew Arney and the amazing staff at Glenroy College as well as the incredibly dedicated members of the school council for their input into this vision for the future. I especially thank parent members Asma

Omer, Racheal West, my good friend Deborah Clarke, Sultan Sak, Ambreen Muzamil, Sara Baig, student members Ali Haider and Chris Clark and community members Andrew, Mahmut and the incredible Serpil, who made the time to come along even though she is undergoing treatment for cancer. I also take the opportunity to thank the member for Pascoe Vale for his ongoing support and advocacy for Glenroy College.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the member for Sandringham, the member for Mildura, if I heard correctly, asked a question at the start and a slightly different question at the end. Which question would you prefer to be answered?

**Jade Benham:** The first one.

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have some overdue questions on notice which I would like to bring to your attention, I and request that you bring these to the attention of various ministers. Those numbers are as follows: 2336, 2386, 2538, 2387, 2388, 2571, 2572, 2573, 2160, 2104, 2143, 2574, 2393, 2346, 2035, 2575, 2175, 2145, 2576, 2335 and 2319. I will make those available to the Clerk. The government are at pains to tell the world that they get things done. May I gently encourage them through you to get this done.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes. Please present the list to the Clerk.

### *Bills*

#### **Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025**

##### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed.**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (14:56): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

#### **National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025**

##### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:56): I rise to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. The coalition is opposed to this outrageous bill, this outrageous attack on Victorians – on Victorian farmers, on regional communities and on the property rights of landowners in this state. We know how dangerous the proposed powers that are contained in this bill are by the fact that the government has refused to debate this bill. They have simply refused to debate this bill until the wee hours of a Thursday afternoon, knowing how many people want to speak on this bill. We have some two hours until Parliament finishes. We have had the government debate one bill for three days and yet shelve this one so that members will not have the opportunity to speak. So I would say the members on this side of the chamber, to ensure that all of us get an opportunity to speak, will speak in a truncated way to ensure that our colleagues get the chance to put their contribution on the record. I would hope that the government would do the same and allow as many colleagues as possible an opportunity to speak, because it is disgusting that a government would not only push a bill through but try and push it through in a way to not even allow members an opportunity to speak. It is an even more pernicious attack when you do not allow parliaments an opportunity for enough time to have their democratically elected members speak, and that is what has happened with this bill.

What does this bill do? This bill shows that the government has completely lost control of the energy system and the energy transformation of this state – completely lost control. We see it just today in a report from the Australian Energy Market Operator showing that the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West has blown out in an extraordinary way in cost because of that lack of control, from \$3.9 billion to \$7.6 billion. It could soar up to \$11.4 billion because of a basic lack of control and partly because of a decade of lack of preparedness, because you need to do more than release press releases if you are going to transform an energy system, as we have seen in Victoria. So not only have we seen an incredible delay and lack of preparedness, we have also seen a lack of preparedness to work with industry effectively.

That has been called out by the entire sector. I do not think there is any question or debate anymore.

Thirdly, this is a government that is driven by ideology over good policy outcomes and practically implementing their plans, and that is what is shown by the energy market operator's report today, that huge, huge explosion in cost. What does that cost blowout mean, and what does it show? It shows that the government does not understand what it is planning to do and how it is going to deliver it. What does this government do? It says, 'We are going to step in. We are going to ignore property rights. We are going to remove the right of the community to have a say over their own land, and we are going to tell them what we are going to do on their land.' This is not just a regional thing. Often people say this is an issue for farmers, but this is not an issue for farmers, this is an issue for Victorians. To bring a bill into this place that says you no longer have the right to decisions in relation to the land you own is shocking, and to do it in such a blanket way is appalling. It is absolutely shameful. No wonder the government has hidden this bill until the end of the day, to not allow members the chance to speak.

And it is not just decision-making on your land, as we know. This bill will allow forcible entry onto your land, so it is not just government in Spring Street which now has a say over what happens on your land. And we know when it comes to planning, the planning decisions that have been made to cut the community out of what happens in their local surrounds no longer exist. We know that. And we know that earlier this year, the government, when it comes to renewable energy, changed planning systems to ensure that local communities did not have a say. If a project is proposed, guess what – Spring Street decides. But this bill is worse. Who could have thought it would be possible for it to be worse, but it is worse, because this bill does not just say Spring Street decides what happens in your community, in your surrounds. What this bill does is it says people in Spring Street can come out to your property and forcibly enter your property to enact the decisions they have made and then fine you for it. They can forcibly enter your property on an individual basis, dish out \$12,000 fines – or to body corporates, almost \$49,000 fines – if you disagree with what the government has decided on your own property. It is not possible to imagine a more disturbing change in public policy position at such a grand scale than what is contained in this bill.

What we have seen over the last year has been a shift in the taking away of rights from people in having a say in what happens around them, which we have been opposed to. This goes one step further because the government has completely lost control and they have decided the only way to get back into control is to take it away from the people who own the property, the people who built the communities, and say that 'Spring Street knows all; not only will we decide, we are going to come into your properties now. We can break our way in and we'll fine you for it.' Can you imagine a more outrageous public policy decision than that? That is why the coalition so strongly opposes what is being proposed. I know how many members on this side of the chamber want to speak to the bill, so I would ask the government to please consider how many members want to speak to this bill on both sides of the chamber and allow all members the opportunity to represent their communities, because we want it so clearly on the record how deeply opposed we are.

To think that this bill includes a provision for so-called community benefit, moneys raised going back into a community, but then the bill includes a get-out provision whereby the Treasurer can take money out of that fund and put it back into consolidated revenue.

Well, we know that the community benefit funding is actually just one big lie – that is what it is – and we know that that money will be ripped out of the fund, as is allowed in this bill, and put back into consolidated revenue. It is a giant hoax. But more than that – because it is not just about that community funding, which we know is nothing more than a hoax – what we are so deeply concerned about is that now communities no longer have a say in what is built around them. Those powers were lost and those rights have been lost over the year. What this bill does is say Spring Street decides and will now come into properties. They have the right to come into your property, and they can fine you: \$12,000 for the individual and \$49,000 for the body corporate. We oppose this wholeheartedly. It is wrong. It is wrong in principle, it is morally wrong and every single member of the government should be ashamed of themselves this afternoon when they support this bill.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (15:06): Bearing in mind the obvious sensitivities with regard to the matter at hand but also factoring in the critical nature of the service that is energy for all Victorians – actually across the globe, but in this context we are talking about Victoria – I think it is very incumbent upon all of us, and none the least those opposite, to be very, very considered when it comes to the precision around what this bill is actually delivering and not distorting the ramifications of the bill.

I should clarify. There is already a provision for enabling access to land by transmission companies under section 93 of the Electricity Industry Act 2000. These provisions are common across large infrastructure projects such as transport. However, under the existing regime the only legal option to enforce land access is for a transmission network provider to seek an injunction from the Supreme Court to enforce the right to access land under section 93 of the EIA, which is expensive, time consuming and not fit for purpose. It also means there is no direct accountability to government, as the private transmission companies are responsible for accessing land – just to be clear about that.

This bill does two things to improve land access provisions. First, it creates an enforcement mechanism. Let us just be clear about what it is doing and what it is not doing, particularly with the creation of unnecessary fear and harm to Victorians by some of the distortions that I am hearing from those opposite. Of course the preference is always that the energy corporations work cooperatively with landholders to agree to access to land, and VicGrid have already worked with the Essential Services Commission and the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner to create an enforceable Land Access Code of Practice.

I do want to come back to some other fundamental tenets of this bill. One of them is the impetus when it comes to the provision of energy. Victoria is undergoing one of the most rapid energy transitions in the world. Investment in renewables effectively ground to a halt under the previous Liberal government. I remember it well. They stymied it. They were absolutely outrageous in the way they managed that. But we have nearly quadrupled the share of renewable energy in power generation since 2014, and we are on track to meet our 2025 renewables target of 40 per cent by the end of this year. There is nothing morally corrupt about driving renewable energy and certainty with regard to the provision of renewable energy in this state, and that is a gross distortion by those opposite and it is deeply irresponsible. We will hit 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. Okay. These are the facts: to get there we will need to unlock about 27 gigawatts of new capacity. To put that into context, there is currently 15.6 gigawatts of capacity on the network. However, 4.8 gigawatts of coal-fired generation will retire before 2035, and overall demand will increase by 40 per cent as we electrify homes, businesses and transport; we attract new industries such as data centres; and our population continues to grow. So I think we need to look continuously at the underlying rationale and purpose for this legislation.

This will create enormous opportunities for our state, creating 59,000 jobs by 2035, attracting billions in investment and generating some of the cheapest electricity ever produced. Victoria's record investments in renewable energy already mean that Victoria has the lowest wholesale electricity prices in the country. Coming to the crux here, to get this cheaper, cleaner and more reliable renewable energy to homes and businesses across the state we need to modernise and expand our electricity grid. That is a fact. But the current legislative framework was never designed to accommodate a transformation



of this scale. What terrible people we are to want to be generating cheaper, cleaner and more reliable renewable energy to homes and businesses across this state. That is what they are inferring really. That is their best argument, and it falls short by a long way. The last time we built a major new transmission line was more than 30 years ago, before the Liberals sold off all our energy assets to private companies, and the current arrangements simply are not fit for purpose.

I want to go a little bit further on that point, talking about harming and helping, because I can see a sort of oscillation in that argument here throughout the energy discussion. I am just going to reiterate this point: the consequences of the privatisation of Victoria's electricity assets were that accountability for this crucial public service was lost, generation assets were sold off to private companies, retailers were allowed to run riot and planning Victoria's transmission network was left to the Australian Energy Market Operator. The result was a disaster for consumers and communities, and we remember that when those opposite were in power they did nothing to protect people. When they were last in government, retail electricity prices increased by 31.4 per cent over four years, and disconnections doubled, 28,959 versus 58,503, leaving vulnerable Victorians without power and heating.

It was our government that cleaned up this mess in retailing. We increased the utility relief grant and made it easier to apply; forced retailers to let customers know if they can get a better deal; introduced the Victorian default offer to provide a clear and easy-to-understand benchmark price; ensured that retailers could only change prices once per year; banned sneaky marketing tactics like bait-and-switch offers, cold calling and door-to-door sales; and have offered multiple rounds of power saving bonuses. All of these reforms have made the retail electricity market fairer and easier to understand. On the generation of electricity, we have legislated clear targets for renewable energy, which have created certainty for investors, because that is the other thing that is critical in a conversation about energy.

Not least, for the communities impacted, is certainty about what is being invested in their area in terms of infrastructure and environmental impacts, and in fact through the legislative change we are actually changing the order, because traditionally through AEMO the order was wrong, it was not having the best impact and it was not giving the certainty to communities that they deserve. Just to be clear on that point, under existing arrangements the Australian Energy Market Operator plans any expansion of Victoria's transmission network. Once they identify the need for a new line they conduct an economic test to assess whether the project stacks up financially. Then they initiate a procurement process to find a company to build and operate the line, and only then do full environmental assessments begin and the community fully engaged in the process. This process is completely backwards and creates the great angst in communities that host new energy infrastructure and uncertainty for investors, and that is what I am talking about – distortion when it comes to the very delicate discussion of these transformative changes and making sure that responsibility across the chamber is carried to be really clear about what this legislation actually does.

The Victorian transmission investment framework addresses these flaws by completely reforming the way we plan and develop transmission. The framework sets out an approach that creates investment certainty, fosters renewable energy investment and ensures the coordinated development of electricity transmission and renewable energy generation infrastructure to deliver energy affordability, reliability and security for Victorians. It puts community and traditional owner engagement at the very beginning of the process, before any corridors are determined.

I would also say the first stage of the VTIF legislation was passed by this Parliament last year and is already being implemented, if we are looking at where we are exactly in this process. The centrepiece of stage 1 of the legislation was the creation of the Victorian transmission plan, and the purpose of the VTP was to provide a long-term electricity system plan. The first plan will identify renewable energy zones and provide a 15-year outlook for the development of renewable energy generation, storage and transmission. The VTP will then be revised every four years, with subsequent plans providing a 25-year outlook. This would give communities and investors long-term certainty about how much infrastructure we need to build and where we need to build it. The process began with a strategic land use assessment which mapped land use across the state to identify areas that are most suitable for new

energy development. The process involved the use of over 60 datasets and engagement with communities and traditional owners, and significant consultation followed this process. We know that energy is absolutely vital, and fighting against the transition to renewable energy is just a furphy, and it has undermined cheaper energy and reliability and certainty about energy for all Victorians in this state.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:16): 'Respect' was a word I saw a lot on signs on the front steps of Parliament yesterday, and what we are seeing from this government in this piece of legislation is a lack of respect – an absolutely disrespectful approach to rural and regional Victoria – and now, added to it, a lack of respect for this Parliament. Having debated one bill for three days this week, we now get an hour and a half virtually to debate this very, very important legislation, and it is disrespectful to regional Victoria. Indeed it is the disrespect of regional Victoria so far in the development of transmission lines and the renewable energy policies of this government that have got us to this point that we are at with this piece of draconian legislation. In my 10 or 11 years in this place I have never seen a Bill 160 pages long with a shorter second-reading speech. It is just a disgrace. The government does not even know how to argue its own case on this. That is why we are concertinaing this debate this afternoon, because the government is embarrassed about it, and it should be.

We just heard it from the member for Albert Park, who of course has left – the government wants all the green credibility it can possibly get from the renewable energy policies it has and the transmission policies that come as a result, but it wants country people to carry all of the costs, all of the issues with visual amenity, all of the issues with noise, all of the issues with impacts on agricultural land and, most particularly, all of the impacts of transmission lines. The member for Albert Park does not have to worry about transmission lines. The member for Albert Park does not have to worry about solar farms or wind turbines in her electorate; they are all in our electorates in the regional areas of this state. So far the government has specifically precluded the development of wind farms in all of Melbourne and all the places that the government holds, with the exception perhaps of the seats of Ripon and Eureka. In the Bellarine – in your own electorate, Acting Speaker Marchant – the Yarra Valley, the Dandenong Ranges, the Mornington Peninsula, the Great Ocean Road and the Macedon and McHarg ranges, you cannot even apply to put a wind turbine there, but if you want to put wind farms in rural Victoria, go your hardest. 'Not only that' – this is the government – 'but we'll make sure you can sign up to the transmission lines because we'll force our way onto people's lands to make sure it happens.'

The member for Albert Park said, and the Minister for Climate Action has said across the table, that there are already provisions, so what is our concern with this. There are already provisions for access to private land for these sorts of facilities. If that is the case, what is this legislation needed for? Why do we need to introduce new \$12,000 fines for individuals and \$48,000 fines for body corporates if they have the temerity to refuse this government in terms of access to their private farms? This legislation is draconian and out of step with democratic ideals. We have seen this already with the government taking away the right of regional Victorians to appeal to VCAT in the case of renewable energy and transmission projects. The Nationals and Liberals will give that back. If we are elected next year, we will give regional Victorians their voice back and allow them to take these matters to VCAT.

I know in my own electorate there was a wind farm that was approved – approved by the department, approved by the minister – and the locals took it to VCAT. They found that both the department and the proponent had messed up, and that permit got withdrawn, so it is not a hypothetical situation. This is a situation in which the government's policy to take away regional Victorians' rights has a specific impact on whether these projects go ahead or not, and the government stands condemned for that. It stands condemned for the approach that it is taking. It has released a draft community benefits plan, but it has not released a final community benefits plan. Its preference is to start with the big stick of this legislation, with the threat of fines, with the threat of breaking locks and smashing open gates to get access to people's land, instead of actually putting the carrot in front. That is why we are at this spot, because the government has manifestly failed to do the right thing by rural and regional people.

And do not take it from me, take it from Bruce Mountain, who is an energy expert, but he is no particularly hard right-winger or anything. He said in the *Financial Review* this week:

Drastic changes to private property rights, as the Victorian government is proposing to enforce a poorly founded transmission plan, are unlikely to achieve its objectives and will poison the water for other renewables and transmission developments ...

And that is exactly spot on. That is what this government is doing. It has messed up its renewable energy rollout, and it is now making it worse with this approach. This is bad legislation. This bill is draconian. It is overreach and it is undemocratic. The Nationals and Liberals will oppose it, and if elected next year, we will repeal it.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (15:22): Well, obviously the member for Gippsland South has never been to Thomastown, because the residents of Thomastown have been carrying the whole load, just about, of transmission powerlines for many, many years. So when we hear this sort of rubbish about ‘Only country people or only regional people bear these costs’ –

**A member** interjected.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY**: Well, I am talking about the electorate that I represent. In fact the powerlines are so into the substations, the whole of the Keon Park level crossing removal had to be redesigned because of the powerlines in order to get the station and the trains under it. So when you are talking about inequality for some, it is just a political expediency. It is quite a low act when you try to drum up this division that somehow or other people in the regions are being treated differently or worse than people in the metropolitan area when it comes to sharing the load of trying to transition our economy and our country and our state to renewable energy, or clean energy, for the sake of our children and to stop the terrible march of climate change that of course is having the greatest effect in regional and country areas, when we talk about the ever-increasing catastrophic weather events such as drought and flood and storm that are mostly affecting those in those regional country areas. I would have thought that the National Party at least, if not the Liberals, would be acting and working very hard to support any initiatives to mitigate the effects of climate change, to stop the warming of the globe, in order to help and support those in the areas that they represent.

Getting back on to aspects of this bill, I know the member for Albert Park gave a very comprehensive explanation of what these amendments are. There are amendments that affect a number of different pieces of legislation that are all to do with ensuring that we can progress and forward our renewable energy plan, which we are leading the nation with and are up there in spite of Victorians for many, many years having to do it all by ourselves because we had a Liberal–National federal government that also did not believe in climate change and therefore left things. The terrible act of not acting on climate change not only put our country behind – except for in Victoria – but also meant that we could not capitalise on new jobs and strengthen our economy in the industries of renewable energies, because they left it so late and did not support businesses in this area and created so much uncertainty.

Of course we know that to have good, strong economic growth and to build industry we need to have the certainty and the support from government in those industries, and we have never had that as a national concept. I talk to many businesses working in this area, particularly with my background from the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union, and they are very critical of the inaction of the federal Liberal–National government around industry on renewable powers.

If we look at the issues that we are talking about in this bill, there are only a couple that I would like to focus on. One of them, which I do not think I have heard any of the Liberal–National parties speakers talk about – and I am sure they never will – is the fact that there is going to be, and this bill looks at this, the introduction of a transparent framework in order to make payments of compensation and other things to landowners, traditional owners and community members that are affected by these transmission lines because of course this infrastructure is essential to distribute the power from renewable energy across the country and across the state. If we want to get cheaper and cleaner power to businesses, to households and to farms, then we need to be able to move it along something, and

that is the transmission line that we are talking about building as a system in order to carry that power to all parts of the state.

This compensation and payment fund that will be introduced means that landowners will receive payments for access to their land. There will also be payments for the use of their land, as in the use of it for building some of this infrastructure. There is also going to be a community energy fund, which will provide funds for projects in particular communities that are affected by these transmission lines. That will again increase investment into those areas, as an act of good faith and to demonstrate that they are helping us all by being the places where these transmission lines need to be.

In respect to access to private land, yes, this legislation does make some tweaks and changes to access to private land, giving authorised officers access powers to enter land – of course under court orders, so there will be some check and balance in all of that. It will not just be people marching in, stomping in, standing on the flowerbeds and rushing in. It will be done in a properly organised way, with the ability for those landowners or land users to raise concerns. Then of course there will also be penalties if there is a denial of access that has been determined as needing to happen.

This is not unusual. I remember a number of years ago there was a big issue with I think it was the WorkSafe legislation when forest businesses were refusing to allow WorkSafe officers onto their premises to investigate serious injuries where people were losing limbs and all sorts of things. There were landowners and business owners that were actually denying access to those authorised officers. I think there was a loophole that required amendment because in some cases the business's home was also attached to the workplace that forestry workers or timber workers were using. Authorised officers are not unusual. Access for authorised officers is required in many cases, and this is not something new. I have not really heard any outcries from the timber industry. Once those changes were made on the ability for authorised officers to enter premises, I did not hear any outcry, other than before it was being introduced, but certainly not after it was introduced. Really it was just a scaremongering sort of campaign in order to try to stop what was essentially trying to make workplaces safer and provide better rights and conditions for working people in those areas.

As I said, I will come back to the electorate of Thomastown, where there are many transmission lines and substations. Not just in the older part of the electorate but all the way up to Wollert there are big swathes of land where there are some of those really large transmission powerlines carrying old power. We hope very soon to see that those transmission lines will also be carrying lots of renewable energy, because I know we are looking forward in the electorate of Thomastown to power prices going down, because we know that renewable energy is much cheaper than gas and coal-fired power. We also know that it is cleaner and it is going to be good for the future for our children. We want to leave this place better for our children than what we have it; certainly we do not want to leave it any worse. I think these figures are only maybe a year or so old, but more than 4600 households in the electorate have already taken up the subsidies for solar panels and investing in renewable energy. We have also got the Yarra Valley waste-to-energy project, another area of creating renewable energy.

All of these projects are fantastic and are really changing the way that we use power, but they need some way to travel. I will give you a good example of a business in the area, Cadell Food Service – I have only got a few seconds. They wanted to put on solar panels. They were denied that through AusNet because there was not the capacity in the grid. We were able to work that out for them, but these are the problems that are coming up.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (15:32): I rise today to join my colleagues on this side of the house in opposing the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. Why? Because this is yet another lipstick-on-a-pig effort from this government. This bill is going to wreak havoc and mistrust right across regional Victoria. I will just give you some examples of why I say this. First of all, the Victorian Parliament yesterday saw a huge rally of country and regional people who are just aghast at what this bill is going to do. It is not just members on this side of the house talking about the concerns with this bill: we had the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), we had

farming groups, we had communities from right across Victoria come here to say, ‘Victorian government, you have got to stop using and abusing us in regional Victoria to make your political statements’.

What are we talking about there? First of all, just in the last week we have had this in the *Age* newspaper: ‘Farmers’ fury over Victorian government’s power grab’. We have got this *Australian Financial Review* headline: ‘Honesty and credibility needed on Victoria’s energy transition’. We have got this from the *Herald Sun*: ‘Allan Labor government accused of creating “sneaky tax” through energy fund loophole’. And just this morning the VFF was out on the front foot saying we desperately need a rethink as AEMO flags huge cost blowouts in this government’s attempts to put transmission lines across the state.

But what I want to contribute on today is the lie and the deception that this bill is wreaking on country Victoria. One of the few elements of the rollout of renewable energy and powerline transmissions has been a promise to country communities that there would be a community benefit fund in that for them. We have seen the energy industry trickle out little sums of money; you know, \$5000 for a bit of concrete at a footy club, some funding for some plastic bag replacements in another small town. We have seen some funds available to contribute to a local hospital or other, at times quite worthy, causes. There have been some contributions, some benefit back to the communities for the huge toll on their roads, the huge blight on the landscape, the uncertainty about what the future holds in many communities. But what this legislation does is supercharge renewable energy as another taxation tool for the Victorian government. We know, for example, that this government has put a nearly \$200 million a year land tax on the transmission industry here in Victoria. This government will sell it to the average voter that this is a tax on some big multinational company, but of course it is not. That \$200 million worth of land tax that the energy companies are paying is not being paid by them – it is being added to our household bills.

In a cost-of-living crisis, this government is using its renewable energy rollout program as another form of sneaky tax. But what is worse is these people here at Treasury here in Victoria have seen that community benefit fund that many energy companies have used to try and sweeten the deal in country communities, and in some part it has enabled some social licence in rural communities, but guess what? They, being the government – this government, this Treasurer, this energy minister sitting opposite me now – are now going to aggregate all those community benefit funds. And guess what? They are going to send them all to Spring Street. No longer will local communities be dealing directly with the energy companies operating in their communities to seek a few thousand dollars here and a few thousand dollars there to make life in country Victoria better because of the inherent and embedded damage that the renewable energy rollout is doing in regional Victoria, but they are now going to take the money, and we are now going to have ministers in hard hats and fluoro vests coming down when they feel like it to country Victoria to gift us some of our money that we already had back to us. If that is not insulting enough, in this bill – and I will read it out to you – is a clause that should disturb every single person, organisation, charity and community group in regional Victoria and it is this one, and I quote from page 82, part 2 of this bill, section 92, part 4:

The Treasurer, after consulting the Minister and VicGrid, may direct VicGrid to pay out of the ... Community Energy Fund a specified amount of money to be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

That is code for, ‘We are going to take your community money, put it into the Treasury, and we will spend it on tunnels in Melbourne, overblown projects here in Melbourne,’ and every other wanton cause that this government is failing to pay for through a mismanaged and poorly funded budget. They are going to take money that was going to be destined for our regional communities for genuine community benefit. It is outrageous. And not only that, they are adding another whole new tax, keeping in mind that these sources of funds are not coming from the energy companies. It is not coming, for example, from Ikea that owns the largest Ikea, the famous and wealthiest furniture company in the world, that runs the biggest wind farm across the top of my electorate. It is not coming from them. No,

it is coming through your bills. It is being claimed back; each and every month that you pay your power bill, you will be paying this through.

But the next bit they are doing is they are setting up another whole new slush fund in this, and it is the Traditional Owners Fund. This Traditional Owners Fund is going to be used of course for this government to help pay for its treaty commitments. Now, think about that. We have got \$200 million a year being added to our power bills on land tax. We are now taking all the community fund money dressed up as a community fund, but of course it is not; we know, like the TAC and WorkCover, this government is going to harvest cash out of that for its own nefarious purposes. Now they are setting up an additional tax on the powerlines, and that is a Traditional Owners Fund. What that is going to do is tax every single household for this government's commitments to treaty and reconciliation by this government. They are not going to be transparent about it. They are burying it in and embedding it in the cost of turning on your lights at home. When you want to turn on the TV, when you want to turn on – as the minister wants us all to have – electric heating and cooling in our homes, when we turn that electric heater and that electric cooler on, we will also be paying for the commitments that this government makes in its promises around reconciliation and treaty.

I say to you that this bill is nothing but a farce and a fraud. It is just another big new taxation method, a weapon by this government to make average mums and dads and average people in the community pay for the largesse and budget mismanagement of this government.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (15:39): I am proud to rise today and speak in support of the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. This legislation continues on the world-leading path this government has been going down, transitioning from a fossil fuel-dominant electricity grid with immense amounts of pollution emitted to a renewables-led grid that delivers net zero emissions by 2045.

Victoria is undergoing one of the swiftest transitions in the world. When this government came to power the state was in a very different climate: investment in renewable energy had collapsed, and Labor had come in, replacing a party that to this day has no real plan for energy transition.

This bill makes a number of reforms to the state's electricity system. It transfers the existing transmission planning functions from the Australian Energy Market Operator to VicGrid. It establishes renewable energy zones, where the state government is directing large amounts of investment, and creates a new and transparent framework for the funding and payment of benefits to community members such as landholders and traditional owners impacted by infrastructure such as battery storage and transmission lines, among other reforms. This bill acknowledges the reality that those opposite and some others around the world do not want to acknowledge – that the renewable energy transition is an inevitable event that creates new challenges for government and the private sector. The way in which we react to this economic revolution, akin to the industrial revolution, will be one of the defining legacies of any government currently in power, and this government acknowledges the challenges but also the innumerable opportunities from this transition. I just might make a comparison. Perhaps those opposite would like to see us going back to the old days with holding gas torches and maybe using the whole Flintstone-style ways of moving around. Maybe that is a good way of reducing emissions – I do not know – but they do not want to see technology developed and used and they do not want to see Victoria progress.

Under the current system the Australian Energy Market Operator is responsible for planning expansions to Victoria's transmission network. After identifying the need for a new line, AEMO conducts an economic test to determine the project's financial viability, then commences a procurement process to select a company to build and operate the line. Only after this point do full environmental assessments take place and communities become fully engaged. This backwards process creates significant anxiety for communities hosting new energy infrastructure and generates uncertainty for investors. The Victorian transmission and investment framework – VTIF – aims to fix these issues by fundamentally reforming how transmission is planned and developed. It establishes a

more coordinated approach that provides investment certainty, encourages renewable energy projects and supports the efficient development of both transmission and generation infrastructure to deliver affordable, reliable and secure energy for Victorians. Importantly, it prioritises engagement with communities and traditional owners from the very start, before any transmission corridors are determined.

The VTIF will be implemented by VicGrid, a new government body. The first tranche of VTIF reforms were passed last year by the Parliament and are already making an impact. This legislation brings powers that up until now have been delegated to AEMO back to state government control in the form of VicGrid. In conjunction with the revival of the SEC, the Allan Labor government is ensuring that the state government has all the policy levers it needs to tackle the energy transition head on and reap the rewards of this green industrial revolution. VicGrid has already been playing an active role in the development of our electricity grid. They are responsible for administering the \$480 million Renewable Energy Zone Fund, which has supported 12 projects that will strengthen and modernise the state's grid.

VicGrid will assume the entire transmission planning function to ensure that we build what we need when we need it. Last year the VicGrid stage 1 legislation introduced additional annual payments to landholders hosting new transmission infrastructure, recognising the vital role they play in the energy transition. These payments amount to \$8000 per kilometre of new transmission hosted, indexed for 25 years, equating to around \$200,000 per kilometre, and are provided on top of any compensation under the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986 for loss of land value. At the same time, the government committed to establishing renewable energy zone development funds for host communities and a dedicated traditional owners fund. Following extensive consultation, this bill delivers on that commitment by creating a framework for these funds. The REZ community energy funds will invest in projects that improve local energy outcomes and deliver lasting benefits aligned with community priorities, funded through fees paid by generation developers in REZs and contributions from transmission companies.

It will commence when REZs are formally declared in the first Victorian transmission plan in 2025. Additionally, the bill establishes a Traditional Owners Fund to support self-determination and the aspirations of traditional owners impacted by new energy infrastructure, ensuring that for the first time they directly share in the benefits of projects hosted on country.

This transition is not only about reducing emissions and securing a sustainable energy future, it is also about creating thousands of high-quality jobs for Victorians. By investing in renewable energy zones, modern transmission infrastructure and the revival of the SEC, we are ensuring that the benefits of this transition flow directly to local workers, regional communities and Victorian industry. The clean energy sector will drive apprenticeships, training opportunities and long-term careers in construction, engineering and advanced manufacturing, helping us build both a cleaner and a stronger economy. This is also in line with other reforms the government is making in the Local Jobs First framework, ensuring that investment in Victoria sees the local benefits compound by mandating that Victorian workers and suppliers receive the benefits from these strategic projects.

I would also like to touch on some of the alternatives, or lack thereof, that those opposite support. Honestly, it is quite hard to tell where the opposition's position on the renewables transition is. I am sure there are some, such as maybe the member for Sandringham, who is sitting in the chamber, and the member for Brighton, who go back to their communities, speaking about how they support renewable energy. I am actually quite sure that if I sat down with them privately, they would not have particularly outrageous views. But on the other hand, there are some within the Victorian coalition and their federal counterparts who do not even support the idea of us reaching net zero in the first place, let alone by 2045 or 2050. I would also like to remind the house that the Leader of the Opposition has not committed to net zero –

*Members interjecting.*

**Eden FOSTER:** Surprise, surprise. When it comes to private sector investment, certainty is so important. The private sector wants a government that will ensure this goes ahead. Energy infrastructure does not appear overnight, and investors are going to be wanting the dollars to be seeing returns over decades. If those opposite were on this side of the chamber, then there would be no certainty whatsoever within the private sector. Even those that want to expand coal-fired generation would not even be able to get their way, let alone any investment into renewables. This is all before we mention the dreaded word that to this day tears apart the coalition: nuclear. We saw what a whiff of that did at the federal election and to their former federal opposition leader.

It is clear that only the Allan Labor government has the maturity to handle the greatest economic challenge of our time. Before I conclude, I also want to talk about how climate change is making our youth anxious. We know that there is climate change anxiety. Those on the other side choose not to do much about it, or anything for that matter. They oppose what we do to get to net zero, our net zero targets. In the process our future generations, our children of today, are experiencing anxiety because of that fear of what will happen to their world if we do nothing about climate change. So I urge those opposite to support this bill – I know they are not; it is probably a bit late for me to say that. I urge some common sense on the other side, and I commend this bill.

**Tim READ (Brunswick) (15:49):** This bill establishes VicGrid as the authority regulating the new renewable energy zones (REZ) and transmission lines to be built as part of moving Victoria off coal and onto renewable energy. Until March this year, if you had asked me to predict Australia's next climate disaster, I would not have listed the algal bloom killing everything in a vast area of South Australian waters. Fish, stingrays, hundreds of species are washing up dead on South Australia's beaches, and the fishing industry, seafood businesses and tourist towns along the coast are in serious trouble. Nobody wants to eat possibly contaminated oysters or fish.

Climate disasters like heatwaves, fires, droughts, cyclones and floods are now so frequent that we are starting to forget what a normal climate was like. A collapsing glacier wiped a Swiss village off the map two months ago, and most of us have probably forgotten that, if we noticed it at all.

This bill will facilitate the powerlines and the solar and wind farms needed to replace coal, the largest source of Victoria's greenhouse emissions and Victoria's greatest contribution to global heating and to, for example, the marine heatwave that is killing the fish in South Australia. Victoria's brown coal gives us the majority of our electricity, meaning that we still have one of the nation's most polluting electricity systems, even though we are at almost 40 per cent renewable energy. With two of our three coal-fired power stations scheduled to close in 2028 and 2035 respectively, we need a lot more wind and solar built in Victoria to replace them and to supply the growing demand for electricity as we electrify homes, factories and cars. With climate change already this bad and global heating locked in to get us to well over 1.5 degrees so that there is worse to come, I want to see our coal-fired power stations closing sooner than scheduled, but whether we close them sooner or later, we will need the renewable energy zones and the planned high-voltage powerlines to generate electricity and carry it around the state.

Because this bill enables corporations to build big ugly powerlines where they are not wanted, the Greens, and I am sure other parties here, have heard plenty of reasons why the bill should not be passed and the powerlines should not be built. Here are some on the list that we have heard. We have heard that the planned route is wrong. We have heard that there is a better option – to build an underground DC route up the Calder Highway – that has not been adequately considered. We have heard that agriculture will be restricted in the path of the powerlines. We have heard that too many trees will be removed and that the proposed 500,000-volt lines are bigger than needed. And while there may be some truth in some of these points, there is a clear need to connect Melbourne with the west and north of the state. We are hearing that solar and wind farms in those areas are already limited by the lack of adequate transmission, and the massive scale of the fish kills in South Australia is just one reason to think that pretty soon our greatest concern will be that we have not quit coal fast enough, not that we have built too much infrastructure in the race to replace coal with renewables.



It is a surprise really that these high-voltage lines have not already been built, given that they have been talked about for so long. But concerned communities have been flagging for years that one of the biggest risks to the renewables transition would be a failure to engage properly and to obtain social licence for these projects. The Victorian Labor government does need to listen carefully to these communities and to do all it can to make sure that there are no further delays. It is good to see the government has taken some steps to implement things that my Greens colleague in the other place Sarah Mansfield, among others, called for when she spoke on the VicGrid stage 1 bill last year, such as a heightened focus on benefits for local communities, including traditional owners; and ensuring cheap, clean power or other high-quality amenities for regional communities hosting this infrastructure.

We have heard a number of concerns about the bill as it stands – more than the general concerns about the powerlines that I outlined above. Perhaps the most prevalent complaint is an objection to fines of around \$12,000 being levied against landholders who refuse access. I have raised this objection with the government, and I thank the minister's office and VicGrid for their time speaking with me and listening to these concerns. I understand this penalty is viewed as a last resort, that people would have to go through quite a few steps for that fine to be imposed, and it is hoped that this infrastructure can be built in a way that ultimately benefits everyone without having to issue any of these fines. The legislation sets out a number of steps that would have to be taken before it gets to the point of issuing a fine. Given the importance of social licence in our energy transition and the need to work in good faith with communities rather than to take them for granted, I urge the government to keep their word and take every possible measure to work constructively with communities so that these penalties are not used.

We have also heard concerns about the proposed community energy fund, and while the Greens welcome the establishment of this fund and certainly agree that communities should see the benefits of the infrastructure they host, we would like the government to have a little more faith in these communities and to allow them to have more of a say in the types of projects this fund will support. So rather than unnecessarily restricting eligible projects to be related only to energy, VicGrid should consult deeply with local communities to understand what their priorities are, because no-one knows the needs of a community better than the people who live there.

We will introduce amendments in the other place to make the community energy fund less prescriptive in its requirements and to involve communities in decision-making. We will also introduce an amendment to abolish the clause in this legislation that allows the Treasurer to appropriate funds from the community energy fund into consolidated revenue. While it is unlikely to ever be a significant source of revenue, the mere fact that the government could take this money for its own purposes seems to undermine the very point of this fund and provide an easy target for opposition. Lastly, we will introduce an amendment to strike out the clause in this legislation that exempts VicGrid from the Freedom of Information Act 1982. There can be no justification for this. Victoria's FOI regime already contains so many exemptions that it is nicknamed the freedom from information act. We need more transparency in government, not less.

My colleague Sarah Mansfield will speak more to these amendments when debate reaches the other place, and I know she will have more to say from the perspective of the affected people she represents in Western Victoria. Overall, the Greens might have done a few things differently if this were left to us, but the bottom line is that we are not going to stand in the way of Victoria transitioning away from fossil fuels. We either have a climate emergency or we do not, and since we do, we need to act like it.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the recent death of John Englart, a powerhouse climate and social justice advocate who was one of the most dedicated activists in my electorate and beyond. John and his faithful companions Juliet and Jones were a fixture at climate protests and critical-mass bike rides. John's advocacy kept me personally active on issues relating to climate and the environment. I was there the day John convinced the then Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change to sign on to the climate emergency declaration while all three of us were handing

out how-to-vote cards at pre-poll in Brunswick in 2018. It was an important moment that I am sure the minister also remembers. Government ministers signing on to such statements signals a commitment to take action, and it is good to see that commitment bearing some fruit a few years later even if there is still a very long way to go. Let us continue John's work here today and take this step to help address the climate emergency we are living through.

It is critical that we shut down coal-fired power stations as fast as possible. The worst outcome would be if this fails to happen quickly enough and Yallourn's life is extended, which some have suggested as a possibility. The Greens will support this bill, and we hope other parties will support our amendments in the other place to try and make this fairer for communities and farmers.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (15:57): I too rise to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. I was just listening to the member for Brunswick's contribution on some of the realities that are put in place in this bill when it comes to access to landholders' land. I think he has quite eloquently put that there have been some commonsense measures put in place in this bill, and I just want to expand upon that a little bit before I begin my contribution and talk about the wonder that is the SEC and the ambitious climate targets that the Allan Labor government has set for this state and is going ahead and rolling out.

On this side of the house, our government's expectation is that transmission companies will reach voluntary land access agreements, which normally include payments for access. Only if these agreements cannot be reached would an authorised officer go ahead and attend, but that would only be after a warning that the landholder would receive a \$1200 fine. They would still have to refuse a magistrate, who would issue such an order. Sorry, when we are talking about the magistrate, it would be a \$12,000 fine if the landholder did not comply with such an order. These are end-of-journey measures that we have put in place. They are measures that we hope we never have to use. The minister, who is here at the table this afternoon, has made it entirely clear publicly and also to members on this side of the house and members on the opposite side of the house that these are measures that we hope never to have to use and that agreement can be reached.

I think one of the reasons for that is because we inherently understand and empathise with the landholders who find themselves in this situation. This is not a situation that has been easy to be in for anyone. The Leader of the Nationals talks passionately about his local community. I have visited his local community. It is somewhere I have gone with my children to enjoy such beautiful countryside, and I know he does feel really passionately about his community and ensuring that they are able to maintain the benefits of their own land and autonomy. I understand that. But we also are in a situation where difficult decisions have to be made, and we are trying to make them as fairly as possible.

This bill is delivering another set of reforms. They are reforms, here in this place, to go ahead and advance our government's bold and ambitious plan to transition our energy sector to renewable energy and to achieve net zero by 2025. It should be clear to all of us here in this chamber that Victoria has been and continues to be an absolute national leader in climate action and supporting the energy transition. The energy transition and tackling climate change is a conversation where if you are out in your community and you are visiting schools – and I am heading off to a school on Friday with none other than the Deputy Premier in my local electorate – children and young people constantly want to talk about what our government and governments are and should be doing to tackle climate change. It is on their minds. It is on their parents' minds. It is the right thing to do.

We have been here in government for 10 years, and we have made remarkable inroads on tackling climate change and reducing emissions. Our last climate target, which was a 15 to 20 per cent reduction of emissions from 2005 levels, we went ahead and exceeded by another 10 per cent. We not only talk about taking action in relation to climate change here on this side of the house but are actually taking real action. That comes from being in government, and it also sometimes comes from having to make really difficult decisions that can have adverse impacts on some people in our community. This has been a really tricky situation. Right now the SEC is powering our government facilities and

utilities, our schools and our train stations, and even this very chamber is being powered by renewable energy generated from projects the SEC has invested in, and I think sometimes it is easy to forget that. But it is extraordinary to be standing here in this place knowing that the lights that are on in this very chamber are being powered by renewable energy that is generated by investment by the SEC. This is not just something we have talked about. We have been beavering away in the background making it happen. This means that when the SEC enters the market it will do so servicing at least 5 per cent of Victoria's energy consumption, making it the fifth-largest energy retailer in the state.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** It is a massive uplift, member for Point Cook – massive – and we are not stopping there. Later this year the SEC is going to actually begin offering to sell electricity to commercial and industrial businesses, helping them make the switch to renewable energy and slashing their power bills. The SEC is going to be more than just a provider of renewable energy. I just think this is tremendous. I was telling my mother this. She is not actually living in Victoria, but she thought it was a great idea. It is going to be a one-stop shop for families and folks right across Victoria looking to save on their energy bills. I feel like it is a one-stop shop that will tell you everything that you need to know about our Solar Homes program, batteries, solar panels – you name it – hot-water systems, where it is made, good reliable installers, the products. It has got everything that you need to know to make the switch to renewable energy. It is also the one-stop shop that will help you save on your energy bills, which is equally important. It is a one-stop shop, but it is also serving as a bit of an education tool for our community to better understand their options, what it all means, how it all connects together, how it is lowering power bills, how it is reducing our emissions and how that is good for tackling climate change.

This is a one-stop shop and has tremendous benefit for folks in our community.

Our Victorian energy upgrades program is making sure that households can upgrade their appliances, heating, cooling and hot-water systems with the most energy-efficient products. As I said, you will be able to check this out on the one-stop shop. You know, every time I am out and about in my local community, particularly the outer west, I see they absolutely love this program. I feel like every single person has got the solar panels, has got the battery, has got their hot-water systems. They are now driving around in electric vehicles. People always thought whether people in the outer west would take up electric vehicles – yes, they are. That is how the SEC is going to work, lowering power prices for households and businesses in a stronger, more competitive market that thrives on renewable energy.

A lot of work has gone into this bill. I think that with the consultation there has been a lot of really good outcomes in relation to powers that, yes, do need to be in place but hopefully will never have to be used. These are not powers that are just implemented here in Victoria. They are in South Australia, New South Wales and, I understand, Tasmania. It is not something new. They are there, and hopefully we do not have to use them, but they do need to be there because we do need to build these transmission lines, and we are trying as hard as possible to reduce the burden on and anxiety for the landholders that are caught up in this. I really do wish that those opposite, who a lot of them I do know feel passionately about this and feel protective of their community, would start to reveal some of the more factual things about this bill and about this situation in trying to make headway into having a mutual agreement to move forward and ways in which we can take those extra steps. Fearmongering never gets anyone anywhere in this state, and it certainly does not get them elected. I commend this bill to the house.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (16:07): Our communities are being ignored, disrespected and steamrolled by the Allan Labor government, which has lost touch with the land and the people who care for it. The Allan Labor government's proposed legislation, the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, is nothing short of a land grab. It gives VicGrid the power to forcibly enter private farmland to build transmissions. I have been hearing the other side say that legislation already exists, and this is no different. Well, why are we here? What are we here for?

No, this is very different. This is forcibly going onto people's land. If landowners resist, they face fines of up to \$12,000 or, for corporations, \$48,000. Most farms would be in a partnership, a trust or a company. That is how we do succession; that is how we run businesses. That is just normal business practice. So most family farms will be facing fines of up to nearly \$50,000 for protecting the land where they have got lambs just been born or crops about to be harvested or where they have major concerns about a biosecurity issue. They will just be ridden roughshod over. This is not consultation. This is coercion, invasion, takeover.

Let me be clear: we are not against renewable energy. We support transition, but what we cannot support is a process that tramples over the rights of landowners, ignores community voices and treats farmers as obstacles rather than partners. Farmers in my part of the world are angry. They are facing drought; they are working their butts off. Many of them could not even make it along with the thousands who did get here yesterday because by the time you milk, feed and try and keep your animals safe at the moment during this terribly difficult period, you just cannot get here. But there were thousands out there, and they are here in spirit. They rang and they texted me, and they are fiercely angry. As a former dairy farmer myself, I understand the land is more than a workplace. It is a home. It is a source of livelihood and in many cases an area of environmental significance.

We have never farmed for just ourselves. We have farmed on behalf of our forefathers, who gave it to us to look after, and we farm it for our children and those that come after us. It is just the way it is. Farmers produce food – clean, green food – that we export and feed the state with. Sustainability is a feature of it. Come on – forcing farmers and making them feel like they are just being trampled over is not an appropriate way for any government to act, but it is certainly what we are seeing out of this state government. This government has failed to engage meaningfully with communities. It has failed to explore alternatives. And the Victorian Farmers Federation have pleaded with the MPs – written to all of us – and you wait, in 2 hours time or an hour and a half's time will we see all the MPs in here voting or will the ones who have been misleading their communities, saying that they want to be representing their communities, hide or refuse to cross the floor and stand up for the farmers in their communities? Every single person in every single electorate who is farming should check how their local member voted on this bill or whether they hid. This bill is an undemocratic overreach. It erodes trust, it divides communities and it sets a dangerous precedent for how governments interact with the people who it serves.

We in opposition will vote against this bill every step of the way, and if elected next year, we will repeal it. Not only are this government forcing themselves onto land, but they are taking away the community benefits that were once offered to communities. Many will say that was a bit of blackmail or a sweetener, but the point is now those community funds will come out of the electricity bills and the access fee. It is not only that we are now paying for it in another way, because we probably were already with the companies, but in this bill there is a clause that actually quite clearly says that the Treasurer can sweep in and take it and put it into consolidated funds to fund all those projects in Melbourne that they cannot find the money to fund. And we will be – as farmers, as communities in regional Victoria – paying for that.

Let me finish with this: if we truly want to reduce emissions and build a sustainable future, we must start respecting the people who already care for the land. We in South-West Coast are not against renewable energy, but we are saturated with wind farms. We have had our fair share, and they are even trying to take them out into the beautiful ocean where our whales migrate on a migratory pathway and birth. This is just beyond belief. Farmers protect biodiversity. We are stewards of the water. We feed our nation, and we deserve better than this.

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (16:13): Appropriately we are talking for a shorter number of minutes here today so that more members of the Parliament can have their say. I do appreciate that, and I will be consequently speaking for a little bit shorter time myself. I rise in favour of the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 – one of the longest titles, I think, but we will get some references from Hansard on whether that is true or not. I have been listening

carefully to those opposite speak about their opposition, and I think we have been listening to their opposition on any changes related to the electricity market for literally decades now. For literally decades we have been listening to the opposition, whether it is here, whether it is up in Canberra, talking about how they want to go back in time.

We have a great history in Victoria of technology and technological change in relation to electricity. We were actually the first place in the whole world to bring on brown coal and be able to produce that into electricity. It is a proud history and legacy, but the legacy itself is quite bad. We know that, and the challenge to all of us is here right now. It is here right now in the fires, it is here right now in the floods, and we have to meet that challenge. It is a responsibility of everyone in this place to put forward a plan to meet the challenges of the day. I do not want to anticipate some of those opposite, but the former Leader of the Nationals has always got quotable quotes when it comes to this transition and this challenge ahead of us, and I quote him from July last year saying ‘renewable rubbish’ when he was talking about batteries. I hope he can fix the record. He said he is happy to repeat it.

**Peter Walsh** interjected.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** He said he is happy to repeat it. Minister Lily D’Ambrosio and I were in our own community, celebrating the changes that we are making, celebrating batteries in households. It is a really important thing to reduce power prices. We met William, who has solar PV and a hot-water heat pump. His change has meant that his house is going to pay off, he reckons, in about three or four years, from the cost savings of going electric rather than his old gas heater. That change is going to be a benefit for the rest of his experience, in his family, for the next 20 years, as they will be reducing their electricity costs. Lauris and her family – we were at their house, and they were actually putting in their second battery, which is renewable rubbish. They are now on zero dollars in electricity prices – zero. And for communities who are suffering with high electricity costs and are really trying to work against that, the state and federal Labor government programs, particularly related to solar, batteries and hot-water heat pumps, all contribute to a better life for people across our communities. Mr Walsh also said:

A reality ... is proving what The Nationals have been saying for a decade – sustainable energy is light years from being a viable solution to this state’s energy needs –

light-years away. Well, I think he has probably got to get with the program, because it is communities like those represented by Mr Walsh that suffer most from climate change. That is what we are trying to buttress against in this state, because we know that climate change is already here. I did not think we would get dog whistling today with the member for Polwarth, but he did get there – shamefully so. I did not think that would be part of the scaremongering that we got to. It is so typical to go low when we are seeking to make the changes that we are in desperate need of, changes that will benefit this generation, the next generation and all those to come.

We should be really proud of what we are doing in the area of renewable energy; we are leading the nation. This year we should be getting to 40 per cent and hit our 40 per cent target of renewables. I am not sure how that quite splices with renewable rubbish when 40 per cent of the electricity that we use in this state is already renewable. This Parliament, as the member for Laverton said, is run on renewable energy. The lights are still on, the building is not collapsing and society is okay. We will continue with renewable energy. We have targets of 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035, and as long as those opposite do not get in power, we will easily meet those. Because we know that we are going to have, in the lead-up to 2035, a 40 per cent increase in the usage of electricity, and of course we hear about that every day. We had data centres opening up in the western suburbs of Melbourne most recently, and we talk about the high use of electricity that goes alongside that. We talk about homes that are electrifying, that are moving to it, because they want to have cheap electricity. We as a government want them to have cheaper power bills – that is the point. We are always keen to see that the electricity sector is modernised and fit for purpose and fit for the future ahead of us.

We are still suffering from when the Liberals were in government, from the sell-off of the transmission lines. It was more than 30 years ago that we actually built another transmission line because we sold off the whole of the sector. I hope that sell-off does not occur should the Liberal–National parties ever get the honour of being in government again. I will sit down now to give a bit of time to Mr Walsh – I was hoping, Mr Walsh.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (16:19): I am so proud to be able to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, because I will have an opportunity to make sure that the voice of rural and regional Victorians is heard in this place. That is something that the Allan Labor government is seeking to again gag, because step after step in the rollout of VNI West, the rollout of more renewables across the state, the Labor government have completely ignored the property rights of landholders through this area.

Let us just go back to step one of what is going on with VNI West. There is a better option on the table. There is a better option which is cheaper to install, which means that it is lower costs that will be put on the energy bills of every single Victorian, because it is Victorian energy bill payers who will actually pay the price for Labor's rush for renewables and this folly of VNI West. Plan B uses existing easements, so you do not have to cause the heartache and the pain and the anguish and the mental health issues that AEMO and the Victorian Labor government have inflicted on communities from Stawell right through to the border. You have not allowed people to have their voice heard. People have been kicked out of community meetings. I actually even heard this week – I was briefed by a council that said AEMO are planning on putting out a full-page ad to apologise to their communities that they have spoken to about how badly they have treated rural and regional Victorians. How are Labor responding to that? They are introducing legislation that would actually fine landholders for stopping these same people who are apologising for their behaviour from setting foot on their land. Labor are trampling on the rights of property owners and instead threatening a \$12,000 fine instead of actually listening to them. You should be listening to your communities. I note that the member for Ripon is not in the chamber now; I would not be surprised if the member for Ripon does not make a contribution to this bill. It is her community that are speaking out. It is her community that are coming to the steps of Parliament in protest of this, and it is her community that expect her to stand up and vote against this legislation that they do not want. It is Martha Haylett's constituents who do not want this bill, and they will judge her by her actions today. We want to hear from the member for Ripon. Where will she stand? Will she choose her party and her career over the people that she is supposed to represent in this place? We will see; time will tell.

I would like to go back to plan B. Plan B uses existing easements. It is cheaper but, more importantly, it would unlock more renewables. So from what I hear, this climate change guilt that you are putting forward – that if you do not support VNI West, you are anti-climate and you are basically wanting all the farmland and all of the state parks and national parks and state forests through regional Victoria to burn – is the most disgusting emotional blackmail on regional Victorians that I have ever heard, and that is what was insinuated by the previous speaker. That is simply untrue. These people just want to have their voice heard, and how is Labor responding? They are responding by legislating that if you stand up against the Victorian government, against their plans, they will slug you with a \$12,000 fine. That is not fair. We can look at the facts and know that there is a better option. We can look at the facts and know that the existing lines which link into New South Wales are brittle and aged and built to send energy in the wrong direction. That should be the priority of government. The priority of government should be to minimise the cost impost on energy bills for all Victorians, because going down a more expensive route – we have heard today that the cost for VNI West will double, which is not double for this mystery bucket of nothing. It is not the Labor government who just magically find money; it is actually Victorian taxpayers and Victorian energy bill payers who will have to pay that price. It is a huge impost. Maybe the government are looking at this as a bit of a revenue-raising exercise. They can get the \$12,000 fines to compensate for the massive cost blowouts we are already seeing on a project that Victorians simply do not need. This is something that has been so frustrating for the communities that I represent and the neighbouring communities within the Ripon electorate.

The frustration is that we see this rollout of renewables with very little opportunity for local people to have their say or to say, ‘We don’t want that,’ or that they want something decent in return. What do we get in return for hosting these battery projects and industrialising our land, which is otherwise a beautiful, pristine environment? It is a beautiful landscape in regional Victoria. I invite some of you to come out of Melbourne sometime and have a look at what actually happens in country Victoria, because it is a beautiful landscape when you do not have industrialisation all around you.

What do we get in return for hosting all of these industrial projects for Melbourne? We get bad roads, we get cuts in our hospital services and closure of our hospital services, we do not have enough childcare opportunities or access in our communities and we do not have enough support for housing – in fact very limited housing. We get nothing in return.

Let us have a look at the community benefits scheme that is outlined in this bill. What does it do? It legislates – there is a clause that says this – that the community benefits fund can go into the general revenue of government, so we do not even get any return in our regional communities for hosting this infrastructure. It is grossly unfair for a government to inflict additional infrastructure on our community when it is not the infrastructure that we want or need. We hear so often from people in regional areas that they want more infrastructure, but they are not calling for more industrial parks and they are not calling for more powerlines. We want safer roads. We want the Western Highway fixed so that it is not riddled with potholes and we finally see that duplication completed beyond the birthing tree. We want to make sure that we have got health services available in our own communities, which is something that has diminished since Labor came into power 11 years ago. Our community want to make sure there are investments in housing. We want to make sure that we are getting our fair share of all of this taxpayer money that has been taken from our communities and put into that big black hole in Melbourne called the Suburban Rail Loop. We want to see some return. Yet here we are with Labor saying they are going to establish a community benefits fund but that money can be raided at any point in time to fill the budget black hole created by Labor for Melbourne-based projects – and I bet VicGrid will take a bit of a clip of the tag on the way through. We just want our fair share, and that is not an unreasonable ask. I stand by our communities who call for that.

There are so many better options than what Labor are promoting. There has been no consideration at all with VNI West or the vast number of renewables projects across the region when it comes to managing fire risk. Our CFA brigades are volunteers. They are turning out to massive bushfires like those we experienced last summer in the Grampians and in the Little Desert. They are the people that would be asked to turn out to fires at wind turbines, and we have seen that recently. We have seen a number of fires at solar farms as well with failed transformers. We have got this risk now of large batteries coming into our area, which, if they catch fire, simply will not be able to be put out. The CFA volunteers have not been engaged with. You need to make sure our people have their voices heard and not support legislation that would instead trample on their rights, silence their voices and threaten to slug them with a great big fine. That is not fair. That is not what any government should do.

You are not delivering a realistic outcome. You are not delivering lower energy prices. In fact as we move more and more to renewables, our energy prices keep on going up and up and up. That is because renewables cost more money. The cost of the transmission lines is never included in any of the numbers that are quoted in the media by the government. They should be included, particularly when you get a doubling of the cost of the infrastructure that Labor are planning and that so many electrical engineers say we do not need.

I stand by the community that I represent and regional people who understand that we can do better than this legislation. Rural and regional people are smart. They grow our food, they grow our fibre. They have done their research around what a better option is. They know what the solutions are and they want to have a fair deal, but they are simply not getting it from an Allan Labor government that is only focused on bulldozing away the rights of regional Victorians, who are now paying the price.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (16:29): I rise to support the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. I follow the member for Lowan. Just when I think the member for Lowan cannot get any lower, I continue to be dumbfounded. The allegation that we on this side of the house want our forests to burn – I have only been in this place since November 2022, but that is one of the lowest comments I have ever heard thrown across this chamber that she should hang her head in shame for. Her accusations around the member for Ripon – the member for Ripon is a friend of mine and one of the hardest working, most diligent advocates for her community. She secures real outcomes, not just talk. She does not fearmonger but works to bring people together and secure outcomes for her community.

That is what the member for Ripon and we on this side of the house are all about. The member for Lowan I note also took up her full 10 minutes of time on speaking. I thought we had an understanding across the chamber here that we would be sticking to 5 minutes or so, which I certainly will, to give other members time. The member for Lowan's full take-up of the 10 minutes, along with the Liberals wasting time through that disgraceful procedural motion earlier today, wasted time upon time that we could have had towards this debate. They stand to be condemned for why time has been limited towards the end of this afternoon.

I rise to support the bill because it is about real action on climate change. If the member for Lowan and the Nationals actually wanted to genuinely support their farming and agriculture communities, they would also support action on climate change, because we know that to take action on climate change means that we are combating extreme weather events: bushfires, floods and droughts. This is all being generated, the science is telling us, because of the increase in and intensification of carbon emissions. The less carbon emissions we have, the better it is for the environment, for our sustainability and for climate change. It is a bill that progresses our action on renewable energy, and it is a bill that no-one opposite wants to admit is about cheaper energy. Put the environmental stuff aside if you do not agree with that, but if you talk about cost of living, we know the cheapest form of energy is renewable energy. Fossil fuel – gas, coal – is becoming more unstable, unreliable and volatile in terms of pricing, both for businesses and households. Renewable is the cheapest form of energy. The energy from the sun is free. The wind blowing through the skies is free. If we can capture that and harness that into our energy grid, it is cheaper energy.

The Liberals and the Nationals always oppose these things. They oppose action on climate change, they oppose movement to renewable energy and they oppose cheaper renewables. The member for Point Cook pointed out a bit earlier that it is in the DNA of the Liberal–National coalition. Going back however long you want to, they have always been against these things. I grew up in the 1990s when, even then, John Howard refused to sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocol – he refused. At the recent federal election they took a policy of nuclear reactors to the people, and the people overwhelmingly rejected it. I just find it ironic that time and time again, whenever we move bills in this place that are about transitioning to renewable energy, which is a lot safer and a lot cleaner than nuclear technology, they would rather have nuclear reactors in their communities, the most dangerous and hazardous form of energy. If they have seen Chernobyl and if they have seen Fukushima, how could they want to have that in their community potentially? How? It is just shameful.

They are having a debate at the moment – they are tearing themselves apart as a party – around net zero. At the federal level we have seen the Nationals and the Liberals going to war about rescinding their position in support of net zero. It is just remarkable. When they were last in government at the state level they sold off and privatised the SEC, and if they got back into government, they would sell it off again.

Notwithstanding that, do not just take my word for it, fellow members here. The science and the politics of their position and their approach to this issue is very, very clear. As carbon emissions go down and we drive down carbon emissions through our actions on this side of the house, the number of Liberal coalition MPs – not just in the state but more recently in the federal Parliament – go down as well. The federal election result, as I said, just proved that. They are now down to a record low



43 seats out of 150 lower house seats in the federal Parliament, only representing 28.7 per cent of seats in the House of Representatives. Labor, on the other hand, off the back of the election, now has 62 per cent of the lower house seats. The Liberals lost 15 seats – a 4.5 per cent swing against them, a 7.3 per cent reduction in the House of Representatives – and that is all off the back of campaigning against climate change, against renewable energy and in favour of nuclear reactors. On the other hand, on this side of the house the contrast could not be any starker – through this bill that is before the chamber right now but also all the other measures.

I note that I have just crossed the 5-minute mark, and I just want to commend this bill to the house. It is all part of our action on renewable energy.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (16:34): I am more than pleased to rise in this place to vehemently oppose this utterly insulting VicGrid bill that I have mentioned a few times in this place this week. At its very core this is nothing more than a hostile takeover of Victorian farmland disguised as energy reform, and the level of delusion that I have heard come from the other side regarding this this week is absolutely mind-boggling. Let us call it what it really is: this is a land grab. It is an unprecedented power play by a government hell bent on bulldozing over regional communities all in the name of centralised control and ideology. Welcome to the socialist republic of Victoria. VicGrid does not empower communities. The Allan Labor government does not empower communities; it disempowers them. It strips farmers of property rights. It is riding roughshod over decades of generational stewardship, and it is giving unelected bureaucrats the sweeping authority to dictate where transmission lines go, with no meaningful recourse for those affected.

This government has made it abundantly clear that it does not care about regional Victoria. It does not care about agriculture, and it certainly does not care about those who actually live on the land, work that land and are caring for that land because it is their livelihood. To them, the Mallee, the Wimmera and the western districts are just blank spaces on a planning map to industrialise with hundreds and thousands of cubic square feet of concrete.

Let us talk about the carbon footprint that goes into concrete. There is nothing worse than – and do you know how much concrete you need to put in the ground as footings for a battery farm or a wind turbine? The energy produced by those wind turbines does not offset the carbon footprint it takes to make it, so where is the logic? There is none. And what consultation is there? Again, there was none. There were dodgy online surveys. There were little ads in the paper that might constitute ‘Tick the box for community consultation’, which is absolutely insulting, again, to those who live on the land that is going to be scarred by this industrialisation of agricultural land.

This bill is not about securing a clean energy future. If it were, we would actually be talking about planning reform, about genuine community benefit-sharing from these companies that are largely not owned by Australian companies either. They are largely offshore. But where is the community benefit? We should be talking about investing in and actually looking at undergrounding some of the technology, where it is feasible, not just putting a line on the map and moving it because it is politically safer to do so. That is exactly what has happened here. Let us be clear: VicGrid is not here to serve regional Victoria. It is being created to control regional Victoria and control what happens to farmers land. It concentrates power in the hands of a few and silences the voices of many.

While we are at it, this bill is absolutely the wrong bill at the wrong time for all the wrong reasons. If you actually believe in climate action, great. But believe me, this is not the way to do it. Trampling over regional Victoria is not the way to do it. This is absolute delusion from an Allan Labor government that is completely bloody delusional.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (16:38): I rise today in support of the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, a bill that represents not just a legislative milestone but a transformative moment in Victoria’s energy future. This bill is about planning smarter, building better and ensuring that every Victorian, especially those in my electorate of Glen Waverley,

benefit from a cleaner, cheaper and more reliable energy system. Victoria is undergoing one of the most rapid energy transitions in the world, and nowhere is the impact of this transformation more keenly felt than in our suburban communities, places like Glen Waverley, where families, small businesses and local institutions rely on affordable and dependable electricity every single day.

Since 2014 our government has nearly quadrupled the share of renewable energy in Victoria's power generation. We are on track to meet our 2025 targets of 40 per cent renewables by the end of the year, and we are not stopping there. We are aiming for 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. Now, to get there, we need to unlock around 27 gigawatts of new capacity, and that is nearly double the current capacity on the network. With 4.8 gigawatts of coal-fired generation retiring before 2035 and demand increasing by 40 per cent as we electrify homes, businesses and transport, the need for a modern, responsive transmission network has never been greater. This bill delivers exactly that.

It establishes VicGrid as the body responsible for planning Victoria's transmission network and a transfer of key functions from the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO, to VicGrid, ensuring that planning is done by a body that is accountable to Victorians, not to private interests. It creates a new framework for renewable energy zones that will bring transparency, certainty and coordination to how we connect renewable energy generation and battery storage to the grid. It ensures that communities and traditional owners are not just consulted but empowered through benefit-sharing frameworks, community energy funds and a new compliance regime that puts fairness and accountability at the heart of land access.

For Glen Waverley this bill means cheaper power, cleaner energy and a stronger grid. It means that as our community grows – as we adopt electric vehicles, install rooftop solar and embrace battery storage – our infrastructure will keep pace. It means that local schools, hospitals and businesses will be powered by some of the cheapest electricity ever produced. The Electrical Trades Union, the ETU Victoria, has long championed secure, well-paid jobs in the energy sector, and the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 aligns strongly with their mission, representing thousands of workers across electrical contracting, power generation and manufacturing. The ETU sees this bill as a critical step in ensuring that Victoria's energy transition delivers tangible employment outcomes. By establishing VicGrid as the central planning authority for transmission, infrastructure and renewable energy zones, this bill unlocks billions in investment and sets the stage for the creation of 59,000 jobs by 2035. These roles span construction, engineering, maintenance and energy services, fields where ETU members are already leading the way. The ETU supports the bill and emphasises the anticipatory planning, public accountability and community engagement which will ensure that infrastructure projects are delivered efficiently and fairly.

I do not want to take more time than I should. In short, the ETU views the VicGrid reform as a win for workers, a win for our communities and a win for Victoria's clean energy future, ensuring that the transition is not only green but also job-rich. This work ensures Glen Waverley remains at the forefront of energy transformations. With that, I will hand the call over.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (16:42): In starting off on my contribution, can I thank every regional Victorian person who has made the sacrifices of time and money for the effort they have made to come down to the demonstrations that have been here on Parliament house steps or demonstrations anywhere in their electorates over the last couple of years. They are demonstrating to protect their property rights from the Allan government takeover.

For those that are students of politics, I might like to remind those on the other side about Premier John Brumby and the north-south pipeline and what that did to politics here in Victoria. I would remind the Premier, who I am sure is a student of politics and very mindful of the fact that John Brumby may have been Premier but never actually got elected as a Premier, and if the current Premier, Jacinta Allan, wants to be a Premier that is elected as a Premier rather than appointed as Premier, she might actually watch what is going on in regional Victoria at the moment and what is going to happen, because this issue has galvanised regional Victorians like the north-south pipeline did, and it will be

an issue that will still be alive at the next election. So I remind those on the other side: you might ridicule, you might say all of the nasty things about us, but you are effectively saying that about the communities that we represent. That is what you are doing. You are not criticising us, you are criticising those people in regional Victoria –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** Through the Chair, member from Murray Plains.

**Peter WALSH:** for what they think about this. The thing that I think about what happened in history here in Victoria – this bill is actually un-Australian. The member for Point Cook wanted some quotable quotes from me; can the first one be, ‘This bill is un-Australian because it actually strips away people’s property rights.’ If you go back to the movie *The Castle*, which was all about property rights, in which a man’s home is his castle, in this case the Allan government is attacking people’s castles, is attacking their homes to allow access onto that property without any authorisation, with the ability to cut locks, to push over gates, to cut fences, to go on that property without any permission

And then if they object to it, there are fines. Let us be serious about the size of the fines. Most farm businesses are partnerships, are trusts, are companies – they are under the definition of body corporates – so the majority of people involved here will get the \$48,000 fine, not the \$12,000 fine. These are serious fines for these particular businesses. So people are demonstrating. People in our electorates who we are representing are actually demonstrating about protecting their property rights here in Victoria and about having the right to adjust terms of compensation, which is being stripped away from them.

**Michaela Settle** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** And I have read it too

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** Member for Eureka!

**A member** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** I hope that remark was not referring to me, Acting Speaker, because I would take exception to it.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** And me. The member for Murray Plains should continue.

**Peter WALSH:** The budget for this project was originally \$3.6 billion. The Victorian Farmers Federation put out today that it has now blown out to \$7.6 billion and could blow out to \$11.4 billion. Knowing the history of the Allan government and major projects, let us just think of a number – 20, 30, 40 billion dollars this is going to cost, and it is going to come out of power users pockets here in Victoria. It is time to go back and have a re-examination of how we connect renewable energy to the grid. Bruce Mountain, as the member for Lowan pointed out, had a plan B where you actually build upgraded transmission lines on existing easements. It is a lot cheaper. It is a lot more sensible. It actually gets more renewable energy into the power grid without the social disruption, without the huge cost. If we are serious about this, let us just say, ‘Have a pause,’ because it has already been put back another two years and it will be put back more than that. Let us have a pause and look at how we do this more sensibly, more economically and without disruption to the community and actually deliver for all Victorians.

I will finish off with a quote from Darryl Kerrigan from *The Castle*, and I think I am precisising for all those demonstrators who have been on the front steps of Parliament. He would say, ‘Tell ’em to get stuffed,’ because that is what they are saying to the Allan government – ‘You can go and get stuffed’ – because they do not want this in their electorates and on their farms.

**Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:47):** I appreciate those opposite and their passion. There are just a couple of things I want to point out in the 5 minutes I have given myself to contribute to this debate. First of all, my understanding is that this bill grants changes of access from the Australian

Energy Market Operator to VicGrid with the same enforcement model that we see for rail and road right now. So for those opposite who are under the perception, you might say, that suddenly things are going to be locked up and people can come in with boltcutters, I would ask the question: on the current network grid, how do you think the maintenance teams actually maintain those networks if those powers are not there now? Those powers exist, and the member for Morwell knows it. I know it. I grew up in the valley. For all those high-tension lines in the valley, maintenance teams need to actually go out there and maintain them, and to do that there is legislation that enables them to enforce that right of entry. We have heard it is a land grab, it is a power play, it is a hostile takeover of farmland, but one thing I would like to point out is that a member in the other place, Mrs Broad, did actually say that this will lead to more reliability of the grid, which she appreciates.

I would also like to ask: what is the alternate plan? And today we have not heard one. If there is an alternate plan, I would like to see it. We heard from *The Castle*, that famous movie that Paul Mercurio is not in, about the vibe and it kind of is the vibe. I think if people today wanted more time to speak about this, we would not have been wasting time with a procedural stunt earlier in the day. We would not have. How much time did that take? We have also heard about climate change guilt. I am not quite sure where that was coming from. We have heard about members wanting forests to burn.

But the thing I take most umbrage with and which provides us with the most transparency and clarity about what I guess the aim of some people is in this house is is when we start naming members personally instead of talking about this bill. Take what was said about the member for Ripon – I am personally offended by that. The member for Ripon is a great member, and I think putting this in a personal perspective shows that this is a subject and an issue that has been politicised in this house today.

As I said earlier, this is not new. There is right-of-entry legislation. But I did reflect just sitting here that we had a condolence motion on Tuesday, and we spoke about seatbelts. A lot of people who got up on that condolence motion said that at the time seatbelts were not very popular. Everyone hated them. There was a lot of controversy about it, and people got up and said they did not want this. We look back now, and I guess we could say that if leadership feels comfortable, you are not doing it right. That is the way it was when we introduced seatbelts, and it is a lot like being here today. There are some things that are hard to do – leadership can be very hard – but it does not mean they are wrong. We introduced seatbelts. Again, I think on seatbelts, the opposition, if it was in today's era, would be opposed. The opposition would be absolutely opposed to something because it was new, because that is its job as opposition – not looking at the facts and not looking at the future.

This is necessary. We have heard people on the opposite side of the house speak with passion and commitment, but at least 50 per cent of those people have been wrong in their assertions about what this bill does – absolutely wrong. You can laugh, but you can also read and educate yourself. With that, I will leave my contribution there because I know other people really want to speak on this. It is a bill that has incited a lot of passion and a lot of dedication, especially from regional members, and I totally understand that. Certainly my opinion is that we do have different views, but these things need to be done. I will leave it there.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the member for Hawthorn, I want to remind all members that the standing orders apply until the end of the adjournment.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (16:52): Communities and people deserve respect, and it is perfectly legitimate for communities to properly interrogate big decisions that affect them, particularly if people have lived for generations on the land and worked the land. It is not unfair. We all experience this as local members of Parliament. When there are changes to people's property rights, to the way they live, they raise it with us, and we know how sensitive they are and how reasonable they are in ventilating their concerns.

I also stand up to say that I fully support and believe in the need for an orderly transition to a decarbonised future, and the best way to do that is for governments to be competent. In 2023 VNI West was forecast to have a cost of \$1.6 billion. Then it went to \$3.3 billion, then \$3.9 billion and now \$7.6 billion. It will go to \$12 billion; it will probably go beyond that. The same has occurred with the Western Renewables Link. The same has occurred with the Marinus Link. This government is mismanaging the thousands of kilometres that the AEMO says the country will need in the years ahead to manage the transition if it is to be done in an orderly way. Why should regional communities be suddenly told and have to accept – because of incompetence by this government, with massive cost blow-outs, at least a two-year delay to VNI West and there are already delays to Marinus and to Western Renewables Link – that their rights will now be further impeded, and they will have no voice in big decisions that will affect them. People are entitled to competency in one of the most important transitions that we have ever undertaken as a nation, and people have every right to raise their concerns.

The same thing is happening in gas. The government is at sixes and sevens over what to do about gas. Whether it is import terminals, whether it is pipeline capacity or whether it is Woodside's proposal in the Gippsland Basin, it does not know what to do on gas. In offshore wind people are deserting the sector. We saw BlueFloat desert the sector just recently. People say it does not stack up, and particularly in Victoria, where we have fairly shallow waters and strong winds, people are deserting.

I look at this as someone who believes in the need for an orderly transition, but it has to be done responsibly, it has to be done respectfully, particularly to those regional communities that are going to host infrastructure in the years ahead. They deserve to be consulted, and where it is appropriate, they deserve to be compensated and generously compensated.

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (16:55): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak for just a couple of minutes on this really important legislation and reflect on how important it is for us to have an orderly transition, reflect on the different tone of debates across this chamber – and even the different tone of debates across the opposition parties – and why it is important that we reflect the need for us to undertake legislative reform that does in fact make some fairly simple governance arrangements and governance changes. Those governance changes and governance arrangements are necessary so that we can have these areas of our state with the greatest potential for the development of renewable energy generation, such as wind and solar, able to be catered for.

I do want to, though, in just a couple of minutes, reflect on the importance of how many members we have on this side of the chamber that do represent regional and rural Victoria. We have got the Premier and the Leader of the House. I sit next to the member for Eureka and very close to the member for Wendouree. Of course we have the member for Bass, the hardworking member for Ripon, the member for Lara and the member for Geelong. There are so many here who are hardworking members of Parliament, representing their communities, and the contributions that they make to policy development are incredibly important and reflect the need for us to make sure that we have the health services, the education services, as well as access to a secure energy grid. I am just going to finish by saying that anything that the Electrical Trades Union provides input into is done in a way that is considered and has a focus very much on safe, secure and well-paid jobs. I am very pleased to have this legislation, and I commend it to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (16:57): I rise to talk on the bill as well. One of the things we want to do as MPs is we want to bring in the voice of the people that we do represent. It does not matter what we stand and talk on in this place, we have the responsibility and the privilege to bring the concerns of our constituents into this chamber. When we have a bill that is up, that we are talking about, and it appears that we are not getting our full allotment of time to be able to relay those concerns, when we go back to our areas, people ask: why is that the case? We see a bill that is before us today which is taking away the rights of normal mums and dads, especially farmers on the land that actually feed us. The government has the right to be able to bring the bills in, but people need the opportunity to be able to have an outlet where, if they do not agree with it, they can actually ask their local politician

to stand up for them or have a legal avenue where they can go and contest what the government is bringing in. What we have here is that actual format for our people to do that being taken away.

In 10 years time Yallourn and Loy Yang will be shut, so we will not have coal-fired power stations any longer. For our transition and being able to move into a renewables sector, we need to bring the community with us. We do not want to divide and have issues where we have people not wanting transmission lines, not wanting to have renewables in their area because, as I said, in 10 years time we are wholly and solely going to have coal-fired power stations off the grid with the rapid acceleration to close them. Give the people their voice – that is what we are here for.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (52):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (27):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a third time.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (52):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (27):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

**Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second and a third time.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (76):* Juliana Addison, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

*Noes (3):* Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

**Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Colin Brooks:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**And Jess Wilson's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

- (1) addresses the potential financial impact on Victorian businesses, particularly small operators in rural and regional areas; and

- (2) provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in this bill.’

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Kew has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. She has proposed to omit all the words after ‘That’ and replace them with the words that appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Kew should vote no.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (52):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (27):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (53):* Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (26):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**



**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

*Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Victorian Energy Compare**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (17:17): (1231) I raise tonight a matter on behalf of my 96-year-old constituent Helen Richards from Doncaster, specifically in relation to her ability to seek a discount on her gas prices. My constituent Mrs Richards was using Tango Energy and noted that she was forecast to have a significant rise in her gas bill from that energy company. Her son Ken used the Victorian Energy Compare website to find a better offer, which he did. He found GloBird Energy, which had a very good offer, released on 21 July, not long ago – a few days, actually – and which is still on the Victorian Energy Compare website as of today. They confirmed they could service his mother’s property. They provided a quote; the plan is on their website. It is all very straightforward. Mr Richards, on behalf of his mother, tried to sign up online. That failed. He tried by phone, which also failed – that was on 23 July. He raised a complaint with the company, who told him they were unable to sign his 96-year-old mother up because there were too many customers, and they did not provide any other reason beyond that. His mother, as I said, is 96 years old. She is a very reliable payer of utilities bills. She was given no reason as to why she cannot be signed up to these deals, despite them continuing to be offered on that company’s website. Her son went to the energy and water ombudsman and asked them to provide some explanation on what might be the case for these companies to be able to use the government’s energy compare website to provide offers and then selectively choose which Victorians they will or will not offer these products to.

So the action I seek from the Minister for Energy and Resources tonight is for the minister to give clear directions to energy companies about how they can provide product or deny product to Victorians when on the energy compare website so that Victorians know, when using the government website, they can be denied a product for no reason by companies, despite being decades-long, reliable payers of utilities bills seeking nothing more than a better deal as offered by the government on an energy compare website. The company itself has chosen to pick and choose which Victorians they wish to take their business and provides no reason as to why it is going to ban someone from getting a good deal.

**Pick My Park**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (17:20): (1232) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to update me on the Allan Labor government’s Pick My Park grants program, which was announced in my electorate of Footscray at the beautiful Hansen Reserve. I understand the \$30 million Pick My Park project will provide funding between \$20,000 and \$250,000 for new parks and upgrades of existing parks. As our communities grow and more people live in higher density housing, parks become more important public open spaces for social interaction, passive and active recreation and play for people of all ages. This program will be great for my electorate of Footscray and another example of the Allan Labor government ensuring that our area is not just growing but growing well, and I look forward to the minister’s update.

**Lake Mulwala Rod Run**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (17:21): (1233) Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on another great week in the chair. My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask on behalf of Wayne Sartori: why has traffic management in Yarrawonga during the custom rod run, which has become an annual event, become so cost prohibitive that this event will now cease? Mr Sartori

confirms that the rod run occurs annually in Yarrawonga as a fundraiser for local charities, and people come from all over to watch the cars parade along Belmore Street on the Saturday night. The rod run brings the local economy to life. It is a win for tourism, a win for local businesses and a win for the charities that they raise funds for. This event has been going for many years and, sadly, will cease this year if the cost of managing local traffic cannot be brought down. What started as a few hundred dollars to put signs out on the side of the road is now \$5000 plus, which makes the event unviable. Minister, we all want our local roads to be safe when we are diverting traffic for an event such as this show and shine, but why has the Victorian government increased the compliance around this so much that this event will surely cease? It is outrageous, the rules and regulations that now must be ticked to divert a few cars around a main street for a few hours. This is not the only event in the Ovens Valley that has ceased or will cease due to traffic management costs, which have gone way too far. The action that I seek tonight is that the minister explain to our community why the compliance cost has increased 500 per cent over the last five years.

### **Salvation Army**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:22): (1234) The Salvation Army provides safe high-quality evidence-based support that enables people to pursue fullness of life and to improve outcomes for themselves, their families and communities through a variety of services such as targeted outreach to the vulnerable. I was thrilled with the announcement in August 2024 by the Minister for Mental Health regarding the expansion of outreach services in St Kilda that I advocated for, to be delivered by the Salvation Army. The mobile services have expanded the operation of the Salvation Army's Access Health service on Grey Street, enabling them to extend their harm reduction and primary health services to those in the community who are most vulnerable. The expanded outreach services for St Kilda include mobile services staffed by a multidisciplinary health team providing people with the health and social support they need to improve their wellbeing and find a pathway out of addiction. This outreach program works alongside local businesses, law enforcement and service providers to inform the best care pathways while supporting community safety. The services operate seven days a week, with service hours to adapt to community needs. These services are being delivered as part of the Labor government's \$95 million statewide action plan. Our statewide plan is saving lives, and these new outreach services in St Kilda are providing significant support to the most vulnerable people in our community. The action I seek is for the Minister for Mental Health to come to the electorate of Albert Park and see how the expanded outreach services being delivered by the Salvation Army are making a positive impact in my community.

### **Prahran police station**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Prahran) (17:24): (1235) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide a comprehensive report on police staffing and community safety measures at Prahran police station. In the minister's response on 19 June to my constituency question from 13 May the minister claimed that there were 51 new police officers that have been assigned to the Prahran police division. However, community feedback consistently indicates Prahran police station is operating with a significant shortfall, potentially 20 officers below operational requirements. This directly impacts police services and the safety of visitors and residents in my electorate.

My very engaged electorate are crying out for transparency because they simply do not feel they are being supported by the Allan Labor government. Such a report should include the actual net staffing position at Prahran police station, with detailed current vacancies and weekly understaffed shifts. The report should also contain annual attrition data for Prahran division, covering resignations, retirements and redeployments, along with a public timeline for achieving full operational staffing levels.

Additionally, the report should address Chapel Street CCTV effectiveness, as the Allan Labor government has deployed mobile CCTV units as part of state community safety infrastructure yet completely lacks transparency about their performance. The report should detail specific crime

detection numbers, measurable deterrence data, total program costs and plans for network expansion. This information is essential for proper oversight of state expenditure on community safety technology. When Prahran police station operates understaffed, response times to emergency calls increase, impacting Victoria Police's service delivery obligations. When CCTV effectiveness remains unmeasured, Victorians cannot assess value from state infrastructure investments. The pattern of chronic underinvestment in frontline policing, followed by statistical funny business and weasel words by the government that mask ongoing problems, undermines public confidence in the police. Every understaffed shift, every delayed response and every crime that could have been prevented with proper resources affect real families and businesses in Prahran.

I am under no illusion that Prahran is a marginal seat. I represent constituents that are Labor supporters and I work for them too. This is a total disregard for my electorate, and the lack of transparency in police data is absolutely outrageous. The minister has the authority to direct Victoria Police to compile and release this operational data. Transparency in police staffing and technology effectiveness is fundamental to accountable government and effective state service delivery. Such a report would enable proper parliamentary oversight of state police services, ensure taxpayer value for community safety investments and provide the Prahran community, which I am proud to represent, with honest information about resources protecting their safety.

#### **Monash Medical Centre**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (17:27): (1236) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the \$535 million upgrade to the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton. My community is excited to hear about the progress on the massive seven-storey tower that is set to be built above the newly expanded emergency department. The new tower, which has been designed in partnership with clinicians, will provide capacity for up to an additional 7500 surgeries per year, getting more Victorians the care they need sooner. It will also include expanded maternity services for local mums, new and upgraded birthing suites and maternity beds to support around 2400 births annually. For the sickest patients, those who require close monitoring and complex care, a new intensive care unit with modern technology will also be included in the new tower. The project will also deliver a new central sterile service department to improve the efficiency of the process that sees medical equipment delivered to the hospital and to dedicated doctors and nurses, helping to get more people off waiting lists and into surgery. Not only is this an amazing investment into the health and wellbeing of our community but the project is also expected to create more than 1500 construction jobs and support additional job growth in medical and associated industries. Monash Medical Centre is already a fantastic hospital with hardworking doctors, nurses and health professionals. This game-changing project will make it easier for families to get the care they need into the future, so I thank the minister and look forward to her response.

#### **Housing**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (17:29): (1237) The action I seek is that the Minister for Housing and Building immediately halt all public housing demolition activities until the inquiry into the government's plan has delivered its final report. The inquiry into Labor's demolition and privatisation of public housing has received over 800 submissions and has heard powerful testimony from residents, legal advocates, service providers and housing experts. The evidence so far is clear and it is harrowing, with residents forced to sign relocation agreements under duress; misled about their right to return; and moved into inadequate, unaffordable, privately managed housing they never agreed to. Residents have been told, 'You take this offer, or you'll miss out. You'll end up homeless if you don't sign.' This is not informed consent.

*Members interjecting.*

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI:** You do not believe it? Nor did I, but we have heard it from resident after resident. It is coercion, and it is happening across the board. And despite this inquiry being underway right now, predemolition works are going ahead in Richmond, Flemington and North Melbourne.

**A member** interjected.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI:** That is right, soil testing – while people are still living in the buildings. Residents were terrified as the floors shook from drilling happening inside vacant apartments next to them. People in hazmat suits visiting their building, cherry pickers, fences torn down, boreholes drilled, playgrounds destroyed, police on site – this is not how you treat people in their homes. This is not listening to residents and this is not giving them choice. Tenants associations representing the residents have written to Homes Victoria, to the Minister for Housing and Building and to the Premier pleading with them to cease these distressing predemolition works while residents are still living in the building.

Everyone can see this is causing immense and irreparable damage to the people, to the communities and to the public housing system that so many people rely on. That is why this community is coming together, people turning up at the crack of dawn to support residents who are distressed, putting their bodies on the line to stop the works with peaceful, nonviolent direct action. They have turned away machines, stopped surveyors and prevented drilling in preparation for demolition, and they will continue to show up in force to stop this government and its disastrous privatisation project – a project which becomes less viable and more toxic with every passing day. That is why this project must be stopped immediately. No more predemolition works next to people's homes, no more ignoring the pleas of residents who simply want to stay in their communities. This is their home, not a construction site and not a profitable development opportunity. The minister must act now and stop the demolition.

#### **Kala Primary School**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (17:32): (1238) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education and concerns the new Kala Primary School. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on the progress of the new Kala Primary School being built in my electorate of Narre Warren South. This new school was a 2022 election commitment, and no time has been wasted in seeing it become a reality. I recently met with the newly appointed principal Tracy Knight, and we saw construction underway towards the school being ready for the first day of term in 2026. Tracy shared how excited she is to help nurture a thriving new school community. Enrolments are already open and recruiting of teachers and staff is well underway, while curriculum planning is also on the go, and now the official Kala Primary School name has been locked in, with traditional owners input providing Kala, a Bunurong–Boonwurrung language word which means 'dog'.

Schools are the lifeblood of our local communities. The new school will foster a sense of local pride while bringing high-quality education closer to home for families and easing pressure on existing primary schools in our fast-growing area. Kala Primary School builds on other local education investments, including \$14 million in upgrades to Hampton Park Secondary College, \$10 million for the modernisation of Strathaird Primary School and \$13.6 million allocated in last year's budget for new learning spaces at Lyndhurst Secondary College.

The Allan Labor government is focused on ensuring that every young Victorian receives an excellent education, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

#### **Mildura Base Public Hospital**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (17:34): (1239) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, who I note is at the table, which I am very thankful for. Mildura Base Public Hospital is yet again in code yellow today for the third time in June and July, but there have been plenty of times where it was borderline, but due to the exceptional work of staff and administration they were able to avoid it. The action I seek tonight is immediate investment in bed capacity at Mildura Base Public Hospital. Let me give you some facts and figures around bed capacity at Mildura Base Public Hospital. The catchment of MBPH is 56,972, plus upstream in Robinvale another 8000 and 9305, according to the health services plan from New South Wales. So the hospital services almost 75,000 people on average, with admissions being around 25,000 per year and growing.

At the moment there are 100 attendances through 16 cubicles in the ED every single day. We have got 68 adult general ward beds, eight ICU, eight paediatric, eight short stay and 22 subacute. So excluding the mental health and maternity wards, because they are specialist wards, MBPH serves their 75,000-strong catchment with a total bed capacity of 130. That is a hospital system that fits the population of a small country town, not a regional city like Mildura. We would not accept one police officer patrolling a city of 75,000, so why do we tolerate this in health care? The hardworking staff have even had to open the day surgery to care for overnight patients, which adds only another four to eight at best. So we are utilising Robinvale, which is an hour away; Ouyen, which is an hour away in a different direction; and Wentworth beds over the river in New South Wales because we simply have to.

I have repeatedly called on this government to stop puffing their chest out about bringing this hospital back to public and actually start investing in it like they promised. Anything else is absolutely disgraceful. When the hospital came back to public, the government and the then member, the then Labor independent, promised patients over profits, which was a fallacy in the first place. So how about now patients before politics? I ask that the minister immediately invest what was promised into Mildura Base Public Hospital for the sake of the health of our community.

### Housing affordability

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (17:36): (1240) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Regional Development in the other place. The action I seek is that the minister joins me in my electorate to meet with workers who will benefit from access to more affordable housing in our rural communities. Access to affordable housing remains one of the biggest issues facing communities in Ripon. There are still next to no rental vacancies in Ararat and St Arnaud, with local businesses calling out for more homes to be built for workers. In Maryborough our industries are struggling with a lack of housing supply as well, which is impacting their ability to grow.

I am so proud that our state Labor government has already started to address this issue, with \$150 million delivered statewide last year through round 1 of the state government's Regional Worker Accommodation Fund. It included funding for 10 new homes to be built for workers in Beaufort, including those in the agriculture, healthcare, construction and manufacturing sectors. The Pyrenees Shire Council has acquired land on Burke Street in Beaufort to build these 10 homes containing a total of 24 bedrooms for workers. It sounds like a small number of homes, but it will make a huge difference to Beaufort. It will boost our local economy and mean more businesses will be able to recruit and retain workers in our region. I cannot wait to hear the outcome of round 2 of the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund, as I know that there are many applications for more homes across Ripon. I welcome the minister to visit and meet with workers who will benefit from more affordable housing and look forward to hosting her in Ripon.

### Responses

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:38): I thank the member for Mildura for her adjournment matter and her advocacy on behalf of her community. The Mildura base hospital plays an incredibly important role in the delivery of healthcare services to people right across the Sunraysia and Mallee region, and I have had the opportunity to visit the hospital a number of times. Our government has invested \$30 million into that hospital, having brought it back into public hands, which is something that we were very proud to do.

The issues that the member raises in relation to bed availability are issues that my department works with all of our health services on to ensure that we in fact make the best use of the beds that are available across rural Victoria, and that is indeed part of what our local health service network aims to do. There are many innovations in the way in which we are continuing to look to deliver health care, both in metropolitan Melbourne but also in rural and regional Victoria. But I do know that the member is asking this question in good faith, and I undertake to continue to respect her advocacy and work to address the healthcare needs of the people of Mildura.

But I do want to make a couple of points. I want to assure the community of Mildura that right across our state, the sickest patients that arrive at our emergency departments all continue to be seen immediately. Furthermore, 100 per cent of category 1 planned surgery patients continue to be seen within the clinically recommended time of 30 days. We will have more to say in coming months about the work that is being done that is showing real improvements in the way in which we are transferring patients from ambulance to our health services, which is as a consequence of the incredible work that our health services are doing to maximise patient flow in our hospitals, making more beds available. But I also am very happy to have a conversation with the member for Mildura in relation to this issue and indeed other health services in her electorate.

The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I will pass that on. The member for Footscray – unfortunately, she is not here, Deputy Speaker, because you removed her, but she did raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts in the other place, and that is an update on our government's Pick My Park program. She is pretty keen to see that program advantage her community, the community that she represents. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that he is seeking is an explanation of the reasons why the costs of delivering traffic management for events in his community have increased. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health, and the action she is seeking is that the minister visit the electorate of Albert Park to see some of the great outreach work that the Salvation Army are delivering in her community.

The member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action that she is seeking is that the police minister instruct Victoria Police to deliver a comprehensive report on policing in her electorate. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action that he is seeking is an update on the magnificent \$535 million redevelopment of the Monash Medical Centre. I cannot wait to be out there as well to turn the sod, because that health service, as it continues to grow to meet the needs of your growing community, will also continue to attract the very best clinicians to deliver the highest quality care to the people in your community, something we are very proud of. The member for Richmond raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action she seeks is that work cease on the redevelopment of public housing for people in Victoria.

The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action he seeks is an update on the development of a new primary school in his region, Kala Primary School, which is set to open next year in 2026. I am sure the Minister for Education looks forward to doing that. Finally, the member for Ripon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Regional Development, and the action that she seeks is that the minister visit her electorate and meet with workers in Beaufort to talk with them about the way in which our government's focus on key worker housing may well benefit them. Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Go Hawks for Friday night. The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 5:43 pm.**