



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 12 August 2025

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 March 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

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

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Tuesday 12 August 2025

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

Bills

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

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

Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2025

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I have a message from the Governor, dated 5 August:

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

25/2025 Roads and Ports Legislation Amendment (Road Safety and Other Matters) Act 2025

26/2025 Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Act 2025

27/2025 Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Act 2025

Members

Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation

Absence

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05): Before we start question time I would like to inform the house that for the purposes of question time this week I will take questions on behalf of Minister Shing's portfolios and for the purposes of question time today Minister Blandthorn will take questions on behalf of Minister Erdogan's portfolios.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:05): (989) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. Will the minister confirm that as regional development minister she was consulted on and approved the decision of Solstice Energy to walk away from their contract to provide gas to 10 regional towns, including many in northern Victoria?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05): Mr Davis, I was put in a position as Minister for Regional Development to approve the changes in relation to Solstice. Solstice brought to government some advice in relation to their decision to close their compressed natural gas network because they deemed it was not economically viable. The compressed natural gas network was doomed from the start. It was under the National Party's flawed policy, the Energy for the Regions policy: taxpayer subsidies were committed to building closed-loop pipelines, which required the gas to be trucked in from elsewhere. Solstice customers faced a 50 per cent increase in their bills because of the challenge of supplying the –

Members interjecting.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, I think that Mr McIntosh was just using some unparliamentary language.

The PRESIDENT: I hope he was not. There was a bit of yelling from all directions, and I could not hear what Mr McIntosh was saying. Was it a rude word? It was a rude word.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, as I was saying, this was a conversation that I was involved in as Minister for Regional Development, but in relation to some of the comments you have made, this is not about a decision that the government made to not connect these communities to gas. I will quote the Solstice CEO, who said that this is not about gas networks, energy policy or the energy transition; it is about shutting down a very expensive network. Shutting it down is the best option.

Of course as Minister for Regional Development I sought advice on what the options were, and the options to proceed with this flawed national policy just did not make sense. It would cost more for the communities of Marong, Maldon, Terang, Lakes Entrance, Orbost, Heathcote, Swan Hill, Kerang, Nathalia and Robinvale. So what we have been able to do is ensure that Solstice Energy, in relation to no longer being able to provide the gas services that the National Party tried to promise people, will provide up-front payments to help families transition to electricity or LPG. And those switching to electricity can also access many of the transition arrangements and payments that we have, such as solar panel rebates, rebates for heat pumps, discounted reverse-cycle air conditioners and discounts on induction cooktops, fridges and freezers.

This was not a decision that was based on any ideological view against gas. This was based on a decision that this could not be provided at a cost that would be remotely affordable for those communities. It is very unfortunate that the policy that the National Party tried to parade around as being good for these communities actually ended up not being so – so bad in fact that it had to be stopped. It was ceased because of Solstice's decision and because it is better for the consumers, because it would have become unaffordable. People who still want to use gas can bring in bottles. It is what I do at my house for my water. You get hot-water gas bottles delivered, and that is cheaper. It is cheaper.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): We now know that the government is up to its neck in this decision. They are culpable for what has occurred. The minister has now indicated that she agreed to cut the contracted time of gas connections in the 10 regional towns from over 20 years to just over 10. I thereby ask a further question: will the minister confirm that the subsidies – the small payments that are provided – will not exceed \$2200?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:10): Mr Davis, on the preamble of your supplementary question, I just need to make it very clear: your position of continuing with the program would cost people so much more than is remotely affordable. But it has got nothing to do –

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Continuing the statements that you are making, Mr Davis, does not make them true. If you think that those communities should be paying exorbitant prices because of the failed National Party policy, you go stand in those communities and you tell them that. What we are providing is the ability to get funding to ensure that you can switch to gas bottles or you can go for further energy upgrades.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, it was a very specific question about the \$2200 cap. Will the minister confirm the cap on support for those who are having their gas cut off?

The PRESIDENT: I think, amongst the great amount of noise coming from everywhere, I did hear the minister say she rejected the premise of your question, and she has gone on to say why. That is my best understanding, with the noise around the place.

Jaclyn SYMES: What we are doing is helping shield 1200 households from the significant price rises they faced because of the Liberal and Nationals' failed policy.

Parentline

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:12): (990) My question is for the Minister for Children. Last week I was made aware of reports that your government would no longer be funding the Parentline service, thereby forcing it to close its doors. Parentline has an annual budget of \$1.3 million, a very small funding pool compared to its impact. The confidential service provides telephone counselling to parents on any issue they may be encountering, and it is the only service of its kind in Victoria. Only recently its value to parents was highlighted when, whilst not promoted as a first-line response, parents inevitably reached out to the service for support in the wake of the recent childcare abuse allegations. Minister, what is your justification for removing this universal best practice service from families?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:12): I thank Dr Mansfield for her question. At the outset I confirm for the house that our government is absolutely committed to supporting parents and carers through their parenting journey, and we do that in a number of ways. Parentline has been an important service. But it is important to consider that Parentline was set up in a time when our investment in family services was much less, when we did not have services that we do have now, so there has been a decision, given the suite of services that are now currently available, from our maternal and child health line to our Orange Door. Since those opposite were in government we have tripled our investment in family services. In the time that our government has been in government we have well and truly established a suite of services, such as our maternal and child health phone line. Just yesterday – and I will be pleased to talk about this again later today – I was visiting our maternal and child health phone line nurses who just here in the Treasury precinct, 24/7, provide an invaluable service for people who are parents of children aged zero to five.

We have services such as our Orange Door. We have services such as our extended network of early parenting centres. We have in the course of this government moved from having just three early parenting centres to building a network of 13 parenting centres right across our state. In 2024–25 there were over 19,000 unique families who received support through the family services portfolio. Across the board we are investing in supporting parents in their parenting journey in a number of ways, from the services we directly provide through things such as maternal and child health and early parenting to the services we provide through schools, such as doctors in schools and mental health supports for students in schools. Across the board we are providing in different ways, in very different times from when Parentline was established, a suite of services that not just help parents in one specific way but support parents across their entire parenting journey from the early years through to secondary school.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:15): I thank the minister for her response, although, while I acknowledge the value of all the services she has mentioned, none of them truly duplicate the support provided by Parentline. There are concerns throughout the sector that there has been a lack of coordination, planning or communication prior to this decision being made. Can you confirm whether the service review of Parentline flagged by your government was ever undertaken and how this informed your conversations with the sector?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:15): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question, and I confirm for her, on the suite of services – and the Treasurer beside me and other ministers will vouch for this as well – we are constantly reassessing the effectiveness of all of our service provision. In making the decision to cease Parentline we have done so in the context of tripling our investment in family services and of having a maternal and child health phone service that is more than 100 years old and that has stood the test of time, but over time we have also invested in services such as the Orange Door, in services such as our parenting centres and in services that came about through the mental health royal commission. In a range of ways the offering that our government provides to support parents on their parenting journey is more than threefold that which it had been previously. And in different ways we continue to support parents through those services that I have listed more than once now and will not list, for the benefit

of the house, a third time. But it is important to note that we have supported parents in many ways and will continue to support parents in both the challenges and the rewarding journey of – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: WorldSkills Australia

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:16): Victoria is home to Australia's best apprentices, trainees and VET students, and we have the gold medals to prove it. Victoria topped the charts at the WorldSkills national championships, held in Brisbane this year, with apprentices and trainees competing from across Australia. Our incredible team from Victoria brought home 18 gold, 14 silver and 16 bronze medals and 26 certificates of excellence.

Last sitting week I had the pleasure of hosting the talented gold medal winners and their proud parents to personally congratulate them. I also want to give a shout-out to the people who have supported the competitors: the parents and family members and their hardworking teachers. I met Lily-Grace Toohill, who took home the gold in jewellery and won the Best in the Nation award for her craft – skills that she has learned at Melbourne Polytechnic TAFE. I met Gemma Scott from William Angliss TAFE, who won in 'restaurant service' and dreams of managing a resort chain one day, and Harry Slattery, who won in 'sheet metal skills'. When I asked Harry what he would say to someone who was thinking about going to TAFE, his advice was 'Give it a crack.'

Through free TAFE the Allan Labor government is providing opportunities for Victorians to gain the skills they need to succeed. We are upgrading TAFE, building new campuses and investing in the right supports so that every Victorian can have access to quality TAFE education. Congratulations again to every winner and every participant in this year's WorldSkills national championships, and I cannot wait to see those ready to go to China.

Energy policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:18): (991) I have a further question for the Minister for Regional Development. Minister, 10 towns will be impacted by Labor's decision to turn off the gas – Marong, Terang, Nathalia, Lakes Entrance, Heathcote, Swan Hill, Maldon, Robinvale, Kerang and Orbost. Many pensioners in these towns across the state will be impacted by your agreement with Solstice. With LPG too expensive, many can transition to electricity only, yet you have an agreement where people who choose to transition to electricity receive a small payment and are told to go it alone by Solstice. They are senior citizens and pensioners who have worked their entire lives. They are terrified that with no spare funds there is a large gap in the transition, and they cannot afford it. What are you going to do to assist transitioning the elderly to a proper outcome that does not leave them without the resources they need?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:19): We are coming at it from a similar concern, because the reason that we have supported the decision of Solstice is because it is better financially for the communities that are impacted. The customers faced a 50 per cent increase in their bills because the company could no longer affordably transport gas in trucks to the communities. This is what has happened. So rather than having a failed gas supply arrangement that would cause these households to be locked into massive bills for decades to come, we worked with the company to negotiate a better deal. What is available is cash payments for people who are affected, but there are also a range of other programs and payments that people can apply for: the solar panel rebates plus the option of an interest-free loan, rebates for heat pumps and solar hot-water systems of up to \$1400, discounted reverse-cycle air conditioners and discounts on induction cooktops, fridges and freezers. There is support available for these transitions. Mr Davis, these people were sold a dud program. We are offering a much better solution, trying to fix what you created.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): There was so much noise that I could not hear all of the minister's response there. But, Minister, what you have not fully answered is what you are going to do to support those pensioners. They are going to be left high and dry, so I ask you: will you revisit the support for the pensioners, for the elderly, and ensure that they have sufficient resources so that they are not left without heating and cooking and hot water?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:22): Mr Davis, to continue the flawed Liberal–National policy would have done just that. The inability to afford gas because of the cost increases of it being trucked – I am sorry, it is an illogical question. Do you not think that it would have been easier for us to proceed with a flawed policy? That would have been much easier, but it would have been impactful and harmful to the community.

Members interjecting.

David Ettershank: On a point of order, President, I am really interested to hear the answer to Mr Davis's question, and it is not possible. Could we have a bit of order?

The PRESIDENT: I listened to Mr Davis say that he could not hear the substantive answer, and then I found it really hard to hear the answer to the supplementary question, mainly because of Mr Davis. But it is not just Mr Davis; there are people from all sides of the chamber that are drowning out the minister. I would ask everyone to listen to the minister's answer so we can all hear it.

Jaclyn SYMES: What I was explaining was that it would have been easier to continue and do nothing, but that would have been harmful to the communities impacted because their prices for gas, because of the flawed National–Liberal policy, would have been unaffordable. I have supported the decision because it is better for those communities. It is more difficult – of course it is. It is much more difficult, but it is better. It is going to be cheaper. We have got programs and support for transition. It is going to be cheaper than staying on the dud program. That is the decision that I had to weigh up.

Family violence

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:24): (992) My question is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, represented in this place by the Minister for Children. The beyond survival project's new report highlights the harm caused by police responses to family violence. It finds widespread misidentification of victim-survivors, collusion with perpetrators, discrimination, racial targeting and police-perpetrated family violence. It also finds that community-based response pathways for victim-survivors are urgently needed to reduce these kinds of harms. A shift away from police as primary responders and an investment in community-based alternatives will help prioritise survivor-led responses grounded in principles of community accountability. So my question is: will the minister push for increased funding to community-led family violence responses?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:25): I thank Ms Payne for her question for the minister responsible for the prevention of family violence, and I would be pleased to pass that to her for a response.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:25): I thank the minister for referring that one on. By way of supplementary, complaints about police perpetrators often end up with Victoria Police for investigation. This fails to address conflicts of interest and puts victim-survivors at risk. So I ask: will the minister call for an end to these kinds of self-investigative police complaints programs?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:25): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question, and I will refer it to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, who may also consult with the Attorney-General so far as is relevant.

Ministers statements: eating disorders

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:26): Eating disorders are often masked behind cultural symbols of thinness and idealised beauty. Too often early symptoms are overlooked or dismissed as diet trends, and by the time help arrives, it can be too late. In Victoria the Allan Labor government is taking strong action to change this. In February this year we launched the eating disorders intensive at-home program at the Alfred, a world-first early intervention service for young people battling eating disorders. As an alternative to hospital admission, the program runs for between two and six weeks and brings care into the home so young people can stay connected to their daily routines and support networks. A multidisciplinary team including mental health clinicians, nurses, dietitians and peer workers works closely with the young people and their families on nutritional recovery, mealtime support and physical and mental health care. This service is part of the *Victorian Eating Disorders Strategy 2024–2031*, which is backed by \$31 million of investment from our government in early intervention, community-based care, and research and data collection. I want to acknowledge the courage of lived-experience advocates like Portia Michau, whose personal story has shone a light on the devastating impacts of eating disorders and the need for real change. Portia’s story is a powerful reminder that behind every statistic is a real person fighting for their life. The Allan Labor government will always stand with Victorians battling complex eating disorders, ensuring they can get the support they need when and where they need it.

Parentline

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): (993) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, Parentline has been in operation for 25 years, providing crucial early intervention in a number of areas, including for families in crisis and those affected by family violence, parents raising neurodivergent children or children with behavioural challenges, first-time parents experiencing anxiety and being overwhelmed, carers and extended family members who step in to support children at times, families in rural and regional Victoria with limited face-to-face services, and culturally and linguistically diverse families facing systemic barriers as well as other things. What was the annual cost of running the service?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:28): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. I know that it is substantially similar to the question of the Greens party earlier, but as Ms Crozier has correctly identified, Parentline did for a long time support particularly families who might have been facing some difficulties. But it is really important to consider that since our government came to office we have invested not just in a phone line but in a range of services across the board to families on their parenting journey from maternal and child health through their early years and into schooling that provide parents and families with support. Since our government came to power we have tripled the investment of those opposite in family services. For example, when those opposite were in power, they oversaw around 9470 unique families supported by family services. As I highlighted when I was responding to Dr Mansfield’s similar question to that of Ms Crozier, in 2024–25, 19,604 unique families received support from the family services portfolio. So we will not be lectured by those opposite. We have increased funding to family services threefold.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, my question was very specific: what was the annual cost to run Parentline? It was a very simple question. I did not need a repeat of the answer to Dr Mansfield. I just asked that question. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to answering that very simple question.

The PRESIDENT: I will call the minister back to the question.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Ms Crozier in her question, and indeed in her very long and thought-out preamble, referred to the various cohorts of families which are supported through the breadth of our family services system and those services beyond the very specific family services system, where we

have tripled investment – as I said, threefold. In the time in which we have had Parentline in operation the services system has evolved considerably, and it includes the family services that I spoke about; it includes the 24/7 maternal and child health line; it includes an online directory of essential services and programs to help throughout the parenting journey; it includes the Orange Door, which provides support for people experiencing family violence, as Ms Crozier drew attention to –

David Davis interjected.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, to go to Mr Davis's interjection, it is a simple question about how much, and I would ask you to ask the minister to answer that very simple question.

The PRESIDENT: There have been rulings before about the expectation of a minister having a degree of detail at hand. On every program I do not know if the minister could up-front quote an amount, but I will bring the minister back to the question.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Ms Crozier in her question did draw attention to particular cohorts that may have otherwise been supported by Parentline, and what I am seeking to address is that element of her question which went to those cohorts. She also spoke about carers who might seek the support of Parentline, and in the time in which we have had Parentline we have had the evolution of the carers help desk, for example, which also supports those who are caring for children in the out-of-home care system. Across the breadth of services in which we have invested in the parenting journey, from the early years in maternal and child health, in our early parenting centres, where we have extended the network to 13 –

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, on a number of occasions member Crozier has asked a very specific question in relation to the operating budget of Parentline. I appreciate the minister's answer in respect to the other aspects, but the question is very narrow, very specific. On relevance, I ask you to bring the minister to order.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know about bringing the minister to order, but I can bring the minister back to the question, so I will bring the minister back to the question.

Lizzie Blandthorn interjected.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): It is extraordinary that the minister responsible for this important area does not have a clue about what the government has provided in running that essential service. Minister, there has been an increase in babies born in growth corridors, and over COVID we know that the maternal and child health nurses could not see families and left those vulnerable families lingering. Still, in many areas maternal and child health nurses are not getting to those vulnerable families, so what advice did you receive to have funding cut to the vital service of Parentline, leaving thousands of vulnerable children and parents without support?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:33): It appears that Ms Crozier does not understand the difference between the maternal and child health phone line, which is a 24/7 phone line that has been operating for more than a hundred years, right here from Treasury Place – and as I will update you in my ministers statement, just yesterday I was meeting with those amazing nurses down there at the maternal and child health nurse phone line. There have been a number of different phone lines, there have been a number of different services, but what we are seeking to do as a government is ensure that from the very beginning – from the maternal and child health stage with things such as our maternal and child health line supporting all of those families who are having babies to our early parenting centre network, which we are growing from three to 13 across the state – we are supporting families with their maternal and child health journey and we are supporting them on their extended parenting journey in the different ways in which they might need support in the different ways in which on that rewarding journey they may also find themselves in some challenging circumstances. We have a suite of services, a breadth of services that

are able to cater to the demands of those families, be they out-of-home care families using our carers help desk or be they – *(Time expired)*

Drought

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:34): (994) My question is for the Treasurer and Minister for Regional Development, who is also a member of the Drought Response Taskforce. Farmers suffering from devastating effects of the drought are eager to make use of the farm drought support grants and start work on projects to make their farms drought resilient into the future, but many cannot begin their projects yet because they are still waiting for in-principle approval for the state government grant applications and cannot proceed until approval is given. Minister, why is the Labor government taking so long to approve applications for farm drought support projects, and what will you do to speed up the approval process?

The PRESIDENT: So that is directed to the Minister for Regional Development?

Wendy Lovell: Yes.

David Davis: And a member of the taskforce.

The PRESIDENT: No, you do not ask questions of someone who is a member of a taskforce.

David Davis: We do.

The PRESIDENT: No. My concern is I am not going to set a precedent where someone asks a question in regard to three different responsibilities. I am just asking: which minister, or which responsibility of the minister, are you asking? Which one?

Wendy Lovell: She actually has three hats. There are three hats that apply to this question. She is the Treasurer and it is grant funding, but she is the Minister for Regional Development and she is a member of the taskforce.

The PRESIDENT: Unless you pick one, I am not going to put the question.

Wendy Lovell: Treasurer.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:36): Ms Lovell, I will respond out of respect for farmers in relation to the drought, the impact that it is having on them and the ongoing support of this government. \$144 million in direct support has been provided to date. You have referenced a grants program that is not a matter that I am responsible for. The Minister for Agriculture would be responsible for those grants. Those grants, as I understand it, are of up to around \$5000 in support – \$10,000 if you are in designated areas that have been significantly impacted. It is always the intention to get support to where it is most needed. In relation to the application process, that is not a matter for me. I do not have line of sight on that. You have asked the question; I am sure the Minister for Agriculture will be more than happy to provide you a response. Because you have directed it to me, I cannot take that question on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture. But as a courtesy I will pass on your question regardless.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:37): Treasurer, you might also pass on that I have been contacted by a constituent who applied for a drought support grant on 18 July. He has now waited almost a month and has still not heard anything about his application. He wants to extend his water system and slow the run of water through the landscape to retain more moisture in the soil. Others want to upgrade their tanks or pipes to make better use of the limited rain that has started falling and any spring break. Capturing rainwater is extremely time critical, but due to government incompetence farmers are stuck waiting months for grant approvals. Minister, these are your constituents as well as mine, so will you ask the Minister for Agriculture to stop hanging farmers out to dry by allowing the bureaucracy to go slow on processing applications for drought support grants?

The PRESIDENT: I am just a bit worried about the question – about asking another minister. I think, seeing the seriousness of the issue, I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:38): Again out of respect for those that are doing it tough – I am probably outside parliamentary processes, but due to my previous experience of drought when I was Minister for Agriculture I can assure you, Ms Lovell, that Agriculture Victoria staff are so incredibly passionate about supporting farmers that they go out of their way to ensure that assistance is provided. Where there are delays, in my experience, often it can be in needing to double-check paperwork, and that can cause some small delays – not usually for the majority; usually it is just certain applications. I am not familiar with the grants program intimately this time, because I am not the responsible minister. You have raised important issues. If you have not already directed them, particularly on behalf of your constituent, straight to Minister Spence’s office, I would recommend you do that, but I will certainly alert them to your concerns.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:39): Since the last sitting I joined the Premier to announce the government’s plan to protect the ability of Victorians who can work from home to do so two days a week. Today we advise that consultation is now open. This will bring together workers and employers alike to ensure that the proposed laws reflect the real-world experiences of working from home: what is fair, what is practical and what is working. All interested Victorians can provide input into how we can ensure this policy picks up on the diverse business and cultural needs of our state.

Working from home is not a new phenomenon. Hybrid working and working remotely have become an entrenched feature of contemporary Victorian work. Since this announcement we have heard from many Victorians on how important working from home is for them, their ability to participate, their work-life balance and their families. Protecting working from home means workers can save money and time not having to commute every day, just as one benefit. It means working parents have more flexibility to make arrangements for picking up their kids. It means greater recognition that workers are trusted to do their roles to an excellent standard and that they are productive and less stressed.

Work from home has also been shown to increase workforce participation, particularly among women, carers and people with disabilities, and very often for those who work regionally, so we see more Victorians able to contribute to the workforce and therefore that is good for the economy. Analysis from CEDA indicates that working from home a couple of days a week has a more than \$5000 annual economic benefit per worker thanks to reduced commute time – that is on top of personal savings from reduced fuel and savings. This policy is fantastic. It is about supporting workers, supporting families and supporting Victorians.

Child protection

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:41): (995) My question is to the minister for child protection: under child protection laws in this state, is it correct that parents failing to provide basic medical care can trigger charges of neglect?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:42): I thank Ms Bath for her question. Child protection workers in accordance with child protection manuals would make an overall assessment of any risk to or symptoms of neglect or otherwise in a child. But the question, as you put it, is very difficult to answer because individual risk is individual and they would make decisions on the circumstances of any individual child.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:42): For a child under child protection’s jurisdiction, it took the department five years to obtain a Medicare card, delaying recommended medical intervention by two years. During this time the child endured ongoing eating and speech disorders while waiting for

the most basic form of identification to be arranged. Is the failure to obtain a Medicare card in this timeframe to allow for important and basic medical treatment not also a form of neglect, Minister?

The PRESIDENT: I think it is asking for an opinion. I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:43): Again I would point out that Ms Bath seems to be speaking to an individual matter, and I cannot comment on individual matters. But it is also nigh on impossible to provide a systemic answer to individual circumstances without having been made aware of those circumstances by the member.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, the minister is aware of it; she has the document – it was sent to her last week. So, about relevance, this case is not hypothetical.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think that is a point of order.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As I have said, I cannot comment on individual circumstances, and I cannot provide a systemic answer without more context provided to me here in the chamber.

Community safety

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:44): (996) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, in the past two weeks the Islamic Council of Victoria has been targeted five times in two weeks in disturbing security incidents, including trespassing, intimidation and harassment of worshippers by a local far-right group at a mosque. These security breaches reflect a rise in Islamophobia. The Muslim community is alarmed and calling for immediate practical protection, including funding for security, training for staff and volunteers, and emergency response and evacuation protocols at places of worship. We acknowledge the government's \$6 million commitment to address antisemitism and Islamophobia, with \$3 million to community-led initiatives. But this was over three years ago, and speaking to the community, there is an overwhelming need for more. Minister, given the seriousness of these recent threats and the growing fear within the Muslim community, will you outline what immediate steps your department is taking to provide direct security support to at-risk places of worship?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:45): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her important question. Of course in my role as multicultural affairs minister I do engage closely with many different communities across the state, including our strong and vibrant Muslim community. Our government has taken a very strong approach when it comes to hate in all its forms. We introduced our anti-vilification and social cohesion legislation in this place not long ago, which is all about stamping out hateful behaviour and making a very clear and strong statement to the community that there is no place for that kind of behaviour in Victoria. In very close collaboration with the federal government we have been working on social cohesion initiatives, including making sure that our multicultural communities and multifait communities feel safe and able to attend their places of worship free from harassment. I was recently at a Hindu temple that had been the subject of awful racist graffiti, and I know that this is something that is common in many of our mosques and temples and other places of worship at the moment, sadly, in Victoria. The federal government have been providing strong grant programs to upgrade security, as has the Victorian government.

The Attorney I know is working on legislation around protecting people's right to attend places of worship free from harassment and hateful behaviour, and of course we have commissioned an important review into our multicultural settings, undertaken by the highly regarded George Lekakis. The government is in the process of considering his report, and we will have more to say about that very soon. But I want to be really, really clear that there is no place for any hateful behaviour in Victoria, including Islamophobia.

The member did reference some of the supports that our government has been providing. It is actually \$8 million, the breakdown of funding that we have provided for both Islamophobia and antisemitism

initiatives. For example, with Islamophobia support we have provided funding to the Islamic Museum of Australia, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Melbourne Grand Mosque and the board of imams, who are all undertaking important Islamophobia projects in their communities right across the state as well as other important programs across our other museums. I think the key to all of this is education across the community to stamp out this kind of behaviour.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:48): Thank you, Minister, for your response. I think we can all agree that all forms of hate are unacceptable.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Mr McIntosh. Are you quite done? This is for the minister, not you. You are not a minister. You are a backbencher.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, Ms Gray-Barberio should direct her comments through the Chair, rather than directly speaking to any other member in this chamber. I ask that you bring her back to make sure that she complies with the standing orders and directs her comments through the Chair.

Members interjecting.

Renee Heath: Further to the point of order, President, the member was purely being factual. Also, I just want to point out for the second time today Mr McIntosh has been using unparliamentary language, and he is not taking it seriously.

The PRESIDENT: I think I heard the second one, and I would ask members to not use unparliamentary language. I would also ask members to respect people when they have got the call, including the ministers when they are trying to answer the questions, which has been really tough today. What I will do is just reset the clock. Ms Gray-Barberio, start from the start, and then when the minister is answering – she has only got a minute too to answer the supplementary – let us try, for 2 minutes, to have no-one interrupt both of them.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Minister, if you would not mind, I will start again. Minister, will you commit to funding for community security infrastructure for places like the Islamic Council of Victoria mosque, facing sustained, hostile acts in their places of worship?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:50): I thank the member for her supplementary question. As I have already outlined, there are a number of initiatives that our government already supports, including the work the Attorney is leading around access and security around places of worship. We also have a strong grants program in our infrastructure projects, which any organisation can apply for. I am in regular contact with a number of different parts of the community around their security concerns. I will continue to engage closely with and the government will continue to respond strongly to those communities feeling insecure at the moment, given everything that has been occurring in our state.

Ministers statements: maternal and child health services

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:51): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government continues to support Victorian families with the services provided at the wonderful maternal and child health (MCH) phone line. It was a pleasure to visit Susan and the team to hear about the ways in which their services are supporting families right across the state. The maternal and child health line is a phone service available to families with children aged zero to five needing advice on caring for their little ones. The phone line is staffed by a team of highly qualified maternal and child health nurses providing guidance on everything from breastfeeding and nutrition to parenting, child development and illness, and the phone line is open to take calls 24 hours a day, seven days per week.

When I met with the team it was evident that they all had a deep passion for supporting families and ensuring they do all they can to help babies get the very best start in life. With a team of nurses coming from communities right across the state, their knowledge of services and supports available to Victorian families extends from the city suburbs and right out across the regions. This year more than 100,000 families have accessed the service already, and this is a testament to the great dedication and wisdom our wonderful maternal and child health nurses continue to provide.

The MCH phone line is just one component of the Allan Labor government's outstanding broader MCH service, which also includes the universal maternal and child health program, providing 10 key ages and stages appointments; the enhanced maternal and child health program, providing extra support for families with additional needs; and the Aboriginal maternal and child health program, delivered via our Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Additionally, the Allan Labor government is extending the support provided to families at this very critical time by delivering a network of 13 early parenting centres.

Maternal and child health nurses are just one pathway families can use to refer into the service of the early parenting centres for guidance with sleep and settling, child behaviour, and parent and child health and wellbeing. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the wonderful MCH nurses right across Victoria. It is with their great dedication and calming reassurance that Victorians are supported to confidently raise their very precious babies.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:53): Can I thank the school that sat in the gallery the whole time with us on that and also thank Minister Blandthorn for getting responses from the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence for Ms Payne's supplementary and substantive questions. I also ask Minister Blandthorn if she could supply a written response to Ms Crozier's substantive question, please.

Constituency questions

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:54): (1712) I am excited that the Pick My Park program has launched. The Pick My Park survey is open, and it gives Victorians an incredible opportunity to have their say on how local infrastructure is developed and how open and green spaces are utilised. A stunning example of what urban parks would do and could look like under this program is the Michelle Guglielmo Park, just down Sydney Road; it is up there across the road from the town hall. It really is a welcome initiative from communities across the northern suburbs, where access to quality open space is increasingly important, especially in areas where population and housing density are growing. I had the good fortune recently of running into Michelle's sister, and she asked how we can continue to have more parks open in the northern suburbs. So my question on behalf of Michelle's sister is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. What areas in the Northern Metropolitan Region will be eligible for this program?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (1713) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding the reopening of Harcourt railway station. In August 2018 the Labor government promised upgrades to the Bendigo–Kyneton rail line and that the Harcourt railway station would reopen if a Labor government was re-elected. After winning government, in May 2019 the Labor government issued a media release stating that planning would get underway for the reopening of the Harcourt station. In 2021 the regional rail revival V/Line project said it included a planning study for the reopening of Harcourt station. According to the Victoria's Big Build website, the Bendigo and Echuca line upgrade is listed as completed. It has now been seven years since the Labor government promised to reopen the Harcourt station. My constituent asks: can the minister provide an update on the status of the Harcourt station planning study and confirm whether the government still intends to deliver on its promise to reopen the station?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (1714) My question is for the Minister for Health. It was recently reported that a Bendigo mother waited 18 months to access critical sleep apnoea surgery for her three-year-old son. This was due to the fact that, despite being one of regional Victoria's largest hospitals, Bendigo Health did not have a resident ear, nose and throat doctor for three years. Although I am pleased to hear Bendigo Health has now successfully recruited an international ENT specialist, there are still several other public hospitals in northern Victoria that remain without permanent ENT specialists. Northeast Health Wangaratta and Echuca Regional Health have no permanent or visiting ENT surgeons, with patients forced to pay expensive private providers or travel great distances to access public services. In my constituent's case, she was quoted \$8000 to \$10,000 for her son's surgery. What is the government doing to establish permanent ENT posts at these critical regional centres in Northern Victoria?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:57): (1715) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. I ask: can the minister update my constituents on whether the government has any plan to extend bus route 441, which runs from Werribee railway station to Riverwalk estate on the northern side of Princes Highway in Werribee? Recently I was contacted by constituents in Riverwalk estate, particularly those near Riverwalk Primary School, who are concerned about difficulties in accessing a reliable, accessible bus service. This is a growing suburb, with many new homes being built in this part of Werribee. There is already a new school and a new kindergarten, and there is a plan for additional shops for the estate. Now it is time to plan for an extension of bus service 441 to service and accommodate the demand. I look forward to the minister updating my constituents.

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:58): (1716) My constituency question is also for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. My constituent is concerned about bus infrastructure in Tarneit and Truganina. Many of the bus stops have no shelter, leaving commuters, particularly elderly residents and schoolchildren, literally sitting by the side of the road, exposed to Melbourne's unforgiving weather. He also notes the lack of timetable screens and real-time tracking on the Public Transport Victoria app, making it difficult for people to manage their commutes. A respondent to my recent bus survey coined the term 'ghost buses', where the PTV app alleges that a bus is arriving but it does not. Perhaps it arrives in the wizarding world and muggles like us just cannot see it; ghost buses are apparently everywhere and nowhere. My constituent asks: will the minister fast-track funding for bus stop infrastructure to ensure equitable and safe public transport for Tarneit and Truganina residents?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:59): (1717) My question is to the Premier. Two weeks ago there was another arson attack in my electorate of Southern Metro, this time in a residential street in Prahran, where a car was set alight and engulfed in flames, destroying another car as well. The surging crime wave that is sweeping our suburbs, our communities and our state is out of control, and this government has failed on every level to keep Victorians safe. People do not feel safe in their homes, in their streets or in their local communities. We are now known as the protest capital of Australia, while machete attacks, youth gangs storming shopping centres, carjackings and home invasions are happening almost daily. Crime gangs have infiltrated Big Build sites. Now firebombings are a frequent occurrence in our suburbs. Private security guards are being hired by councils, and too many of my constituents are also having to resort to using personal security. Police stations are understaffed and closing. So I ask: what will your government do to stop the lawlessness that is eroding my constituents' sense of safety?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (13:00): (1718) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. Minister, last week's decision by the state government to approve the Beveridge North West quarry has left the Wallan–Beveridge community absolutely devastated. Since the announcement many residents have reached out feeling angry, exhausted and ignored. They have spent years campaigning, only to be dismissed by this decision. This is the first time in Victoria's history that a quarry has been approved in the middle of a future residential growth area, before homes, schools or essential infrastructure. The site is less than a kilometre from existing homes and puts health, property values and the environment at risk. Many residents are now considering leaving their community altogether. Minister, how can you justify this decision in the face of such strong opposition, and will you listen to the community and urgently revoke approval of the quarry in the *Beveridge North West Precinct Structure Plan*?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:01): (1719) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The south-east is Australia's pre-eminent economic powerhouse, producing at least a third of Victoria's manufacturing output and providing 80,000 jobs in the sector, but its enormous potential is hampered by crumbling and inadequate infrastructure, courtesy of this Allan Labor government. Unlike many of those opposite I am not an occasional tourist in my electorate. I live and work in the south-east, facing the same issues residents experience. We know firsthand the need for upgrades to arterial roads like Thompsons Road. While traffic lights were promised at Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road in the state budget, what is also desperately needed is an extension from Clyde North to Officer South and Pakenham. Minister, will you heed calls from my community, including from Greater South East Melbourne, which represents eight councils, to deliver this extension?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:01): (1720) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. A constituent of mine has raised with me the continued lack of off-peak services on the Belgrave and Lilydale lines as an issue that makes life harder for many people in my region who rely on using the train, be it on parts of the line or right across these lines that I have mentioned. The off-peak frequency at many stations along these lines is, frankly, just not good enough. In a big city like Melbourne people should not have to be waiting for, say, 30 minutes for a train outside of peak times. In many other cities around the world this would be, frankly, unimaginable. We need to improve this train frequency. As the constituent rightly pointed out, this particularly affects young people getting to jobs or heading to events, but it also impacts those who do not drive. Minister, people in my region need to be able to rely on fast and frequent public transport to travel. Will you increase off-peak train services on the Belgrave and Lilydale lines?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:02): (1721) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Wayne Churchill, a farmer from Woolamai, applied for a farm drought support grant on 24 June, fulfilling all the obligations, including the declaration of his annual income. Seven weeks have passed and Mr Churchill is yet to receive any acknowledgement, correspondence or financial assistance. This delay has a direct impact on his farm operations. The grant is required in order for him to increase his dam capacity in winter, enabling him to restock for summer – exactly what these grants are supposed to be about. Due to the lack of communication and support, his water supply will now be insufficient unless there is above average rainfall. Given the urgency and the seasonal dependency on such infrastructure improvements, can the minister expedite his case and ensure that he gets this grant in a timely manner – this week?

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (13:03): (1722) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My constituents ask: when will the dangerous surface of the Murray Valley Highway from Yarroweyah to Strathmerton be repaired? My constituent Kevin reached out to my office recently to express his utter disgust at the unsafe condition of the Murray Valley Highway in the 11-kilometre stretch between Yarroweyah and Strathmerton. Kevin reported to me that there are groups of large potholes scattered throughout this section of road, some forcing drivers onto the wrong side of the road to avoid them. He also stated that the road is very unsafe, and he believes repairs are urgently needed to make the road less dangerous for motorists. My constituents ask the Minister for Roads and Road Safety: when will the dangerous surface of the Murray Valley Highway from Yarroweyah to Strathmerton be repaired?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:04): (1723) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services in support of the Pomonal community in my electorate. In February 2024 a bushfire destroyed 45 homes, nearly a third of the town, and then last summer they faced the widespread Grampians fire. This is a community that fights its own fires and looks after its own safety; all they are asking for is the right equipment. Following their debrief the brigade identified the urgent need for an ultralight tanker, essential for first-attack and remote-access firefighting. They applied for a volunteer emergency services equipment program grant last year, where local brigades in the state co-fund equipment, but were knocked back. They are applying again this year. Minister, given your government's new emergency services and volunteers fund tax, which disproportionately drains communities like Pomonal, will you ensure they finally get the vehicle they are already paying for and need desperately to protect the town?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:05): (1724) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building. It has come to my attention that the Knox City Council in my electorate has been banning or severely limiting Scouts and Girl Guides from conducting sleepovers in their own buildings, in their own halls. I am advised that the council's position is that these halls are considered class 9B – places of assembly – under the National Construction Code, and overnight accommodation is not allowed unless exorbitant surveyor fees on each and every occasion, up to \$1400, are paid. This is despite the Scouts covering all compliance and insurance. This is clearly not the intention of the law, and it is deeply concerning that local government surveyors have, out of the blue, unilaterally decided to reinterpret the act. Could I please ask the minister to intervene and give Knox council and any other councils clear direction that this is not the purpose of the law?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:06): (1725) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, will you order immediate repairs to the dangerous potholes on Donnybrook Road? Donnybrook Road is currently a single-lane road that suffers chronic congestion every single day, and the Labor government has no plan to fix the traffic problem by duplicating the road. Heavy vehicles on the old country track have also damaged the road surface significantly, and constituents have reported that there are large and growing potholes on Donnybrook Road towards the Merriang Road end. Temporary patches quickly disintegrate, and my constituents note that cars frequently cross to the other side of the road to avoid the massive holes in the road surface. Those potholes are damaging cars and could easily lead to collisions and injuries. The minister must order the Department of Transport and Planning to urgently rehabilitate the potholed road surface in the short term and completely duplicate and renew the road pavement as soon as possible.

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:07): (1726) My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it concerns a series of individuals in my electorate who have come to me with new bill increases on their electricity and gas bills. Many of these relate to an increase that occurred on 1 August – just gone – and that bill increase seems to range between 7 and 15 per cent on the supply charge and similar amounts for all of the bands of electricity or all of the bands of gas. There are significant increases that are coming forward in my electorate through the notification from the various electricity groups. It is not my business to single out one electricity group, because what we are seeing is general, but the point here is that the minister for energy promised electricity prices would go down, down – that is what she said – but actually they are going up, up, and she needs to act and explain to the community why their bills are going up, up.

Petitions

Victorian Fisheries Authority

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 20,115 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that on Tuesday, 20 May 2025, the Victorian Fisheries Authority announced it would permanently close Fisheries Stations at Braeside and Altona North, leaving no fisheries stations at the north end of Port Phillip Bay, and cut 44 per cent of full-time employed Fisheries Officers reducing from 69 to 39 positions. This is in pursuit of \$9.4 million in Government savings without seeking or receiving a risk assessment. These cuts to both resources and frontline Fisheries Officers will inevitably compromise the State's ability to: enforce fishing regulations and protect its iconic marine life from criminals, along with the sustainability of Victoria's immensely valuable commercial and recreational fisheries; prevent significant numbers of drownings by undertaking regular and widespread marine safety inspections; deploy sufficient marine equipment, vessels and expert personnel as needed in accordance with the State Emergency Management Plan; and prevent illegal or antisocial behaviour on crown land river frontage camping locations by providing a visible enforcement presence.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to inquire into whether the Victorian Fisheries Authority's '2025 workforce changes' announced on 20 May 2025 defies assurances implied under the 2023–24 Budget Paper No. 3: Service Delivery, 'COVID Debt Repayment Plan – savings and efficiencies' initiative, and ensure that frontline staff and service delivery be protected from cost cutting.

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

Wildlife protection

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 3485 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need for a road levy charge for registered vehicles to help fund emergency wildlife care.

Australia has one of the highest mammal extinction rates in the world, greatly affecting our native wildlife. One of the biggest contributing factors is road trauma from car and truck accidents. Last year there were thousands of reported cases of wildlife killed or maimed on our roads in Victoria.

Wildlife care is primarily managed by volunteers who give their own time and money to rescue, rehabilitate and respond to emergencies, including road strikes. The Government currently issues sporadic funding through grant programs with different sets of limitations for shelter operators and rescuers. These are often capped at \$3,000, which is barely enough to pay for food and medicine to care for injured and orphaned animals. Additional funding could be obtained by adding a \$2 levy to each Victorian vehicle registration which can then be utilised to provide a more consistent and secure grant program, giving back to the people on the ground.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to implement a road levy charge for registered vehicles to help fund emergency wildlife care.

Georgie PURCELL: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Koyuga Nanneella wind farm

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 1621 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the Fera Australia wind energy facility proposal in the Koyuga Nanneella area. While we support renewable energy initiatives, we firmly oppose the proposed location.

Fera intends to install 25 wind turbines with a towering tip height of 265 metres and blades spanning 170 metres. The small land allotments in our area mean that many neighbours would live in close proximity to the proposed facility. Fera's proposed setback distance of only one kilometre between the turbines and neighbouring homes falls significantly short of best practices. According to the NSW draft wind energy policy framework, a turbine this size should be no less than 2.25 kilometres from neighbouring dwellings.

The proposed location lies on a floodplain and upgrades required to access roads, installation of crane pads, and soil relocation during construction could obstruct floodwater flow. This facility could exacerbate future flooding risks. The site earmarked is productive irrigatable land used for intensive food production. Installing wind turbines here would compromise valuable agricultural resources.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to withhold approval of the Fera Australia Koyuga Nanneella wind farm based on its unsuitable location.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (13:11): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 in relation to publishing or broadcasting information that may identify parties in guardianship and administration proceedings before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 10*

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:12): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 10 of 2025, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.**Environment and Planning Committee***Inquiry into Climate Resilience*

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (13:13): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report on the inquiry into climate resilience, including an appendix, extracts of proceedings and minority reports, from the Environment and Planning Committee and present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

The Environment and Planning Committee has completed its significant report into climate resilience. The terms of reference prepared gave us a very wide scope to investigate this particularly critical issue. Obviously the committee first and foremost acknowledged the reality of Victoria's changing climate and the severity of those impacts. The committee focused our inquiry on the way that climate change is impacting on Victoria's built environment and the infrastructure associated with it. We did some in-depth examinations of how our planning and building systems are responding to the risks posed by climate change and also how good governance of climate issues can help ensure that the community is well prepared for climate-related events.

We heard evidence from right across the state of the increasing frequency and severity of natural disaster events. We had evidence from a witness in Mount Macedon that they were responding to a bushfire event and a flooding event on the same day. The committee obviously in its prior inquiry into the 2022 flood event is familiar with many of the matters raised in this area. This report advocates that we need to not only respond well to disasters when they occur but also ensure that in the response and the follow-up to those disasters we are building resilience into our built environment, doing more to ensure preparedness for future disasters and putting in place mitigation measures to reduce the impact of climate change.

The committee received 285 submissions from a range of stakeholders, including from local governments from across the state, from various advocacy bodies, from members of the community and from experts in climate science. I particularly want to thank those scientific experts who gave us a very honest and stark appraisal of the way that Victoria's climate is changing and the impacts therein. We held eight days of public hearings and heard from over 130 witnesses from places as far afield as Traralgon and Aireys Inlet. We went to Mount Macedon, we went out to Emerald and we held some hearings here in Melbourne.

The committee heard and research shows that existing climate zones and weather patterns in Victoria are changing, with extreme weather events such as heatwaves, bushfires, droughts, storms and flooding events becoming more common because of climate change. Average temperatures are rising. We have more hot days over 35 degrees than ever before. Our bushfire seasons are longer and hotter.

Sea levels are rising, we are seeing increased coastal erosion and our storm events are intensifying because of the way that our average temperatures are rising and their associated changes.

The report also builds on the work we did during our inquiry into the 2022 flooding event. It makes 82 recommendations and 93 findings across a range of interconnected legislative policy issues and details how we can deal with these climate risks. During the course of the committee's inquiry there was some significant legislation passed by the Parliament to ensure that climate risk was included as an issue that needs to be taken into account by Victoria's planning system, and we also obviously drew on the work of the previous select committee into the changes to the planning scheme.

I want to thank the committee secretariat, led by senior committee manager Lilian Topic, research assistant Alyssa Topy, inquiry officer Caitlin Connally and communications adviser Bill Bainbridge, with administrative support from Monique Riordan-Hill and Sylvette Bassy. Niamh McEvoy, a colleague on secondment from the UK House of Commons, also contributed to the report. We express, as ever, our thanks to the Hansard and broadcasting teams, who were able to beam our efforts to the world when we had our hearings in Melbourne and regionally. This was a significant and complex topic that the committee had to digest, and I particularly want to thank all members of the committee for the collegiate way in which we went about this investigation. I commend the report to the house.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:18): I would like to make a brief comment on the climate resilience Environment and Planning Committee report and indeed thank the secretariat and the wonderful Lilian Topic and her fabulous team for managing what could only be called a 'short history of the world' compendium, which really scratches the surface but also does not go far enough.

Victoria is certainly navigating a complex climate landscape with growing risks calling for proactive planning, but meeting those challenges requires far more than rhetoric. It demands leadership, transparency and respect for local communities. The climate resilience final report lays out the risks, but the Liberals and Nationals minority report exposes the failures on its delivery. As the president of the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club Glenn Arnold said:

The layers of bureaucracy are ultimately just crippling any decision-making and paralysing any action moving forward.

Coastal communities are watching their infrastructure and public assets erode and have concern around their private assets as well. On planning and building, the government's layered red and green tape is stalling housing, inflating costs and pushing home ownership out of reach. Indeed Master Builders Australia said construction costs have increased by 40 per cent in the past five years, while productivity has declined by 18 per cent. We heard from councils that the cost of rebuilding infrastructure has doubled in the last five years without factoring in climate change, yet disaster funding still forces them to rebuild to outdated standards. In agriculture we see the push for renewables is steamrolling farmers, and legislation now before us allows forced entry into private land.

Finally, we see that this report, which is a decent look into these issues, became weaponised through the emergency services tax, which should never have been in this report at all. The Liberals and Nationals certainly fundamentally support the strengthening of Victoria's resilience, but it should not be cost shifting dressed up as reform. Please, I ask the committee to read the minority report.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:20): I would like to start by thanking the secretariat, who worked incredibly hard on what was a very broad inquiry where there were mountains of evidence. I would also like to thank the chair, my fellow committee members and the hundreds of people who made submissions or appeared as witnesses. This was a really important inquiry, a really useful one, but it should serve as a wake-up call for the government: it was clear that we are not prepared. We have some great strategies and great ideas about what needs to happen but a clear lack of action. In fact not only are we not prepared, we are well behind, something many communities know all too well because they are already living it. They are experiencing rolling climate disasters and experiencing coastal erosion and inundation, and it is forcing impossible decisions for them.

Communities also have many of the answers, but they lack the systems and support required to empower them. We really welcome the report, in particular the calls to embed climate resilience across all parts of government and require leadership from the top, not just siloing it within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. We also support the recommendations to overhaul the planning system, lift energy efficiency standards of buildings, including new builds and retrofits, and ensure that home owners and renters know what energy efficiency standards are for properties they may be moving into.

Importantly, the committee recommended establishing a climate adaptation fund to support resilience measures by local governments and communities as well as a resilient home scheme similar to those in New South Wales and Queensland that enables homes in high-risk areas to be retrofitted or moved. However, despite a third of submissions calling for polluters to pay for adaptation, this was not supported in the majority report. The financial burden on citizens as a result of climate change impacts is substantial and growing, yet most polluting industries reap immense profits, pay little or no tax and take no responsibility for the consequences of their business. It is completely unjust, and that is why I have recommended a polluter-pays levy in my minority report.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:22): I also rise to join in this debate on the tabling of the report on the climate resilience inquiry. I would like to start out by thanking Lilian Topic and her team for the assistance that they provided to the committee and for the wonderful job they have done in presenting the report of what was a very long and very detailed inquiry. I would also like to thank all those members of the public who put in submissions and gave evidence to our inquiry, because it was enlightening to hear from so many people on the different issues that are facing Victoria, and there is no doubt that we are facing a period of climate change and we need to be more resilient.

Mr Batchelor mentioned the collegiate way that the committee went about the inquiry, and yes, there was a collegiate response to the inquiry and the way that we conducted the inquiry. However, I was extremely disappointed when we received the chair's draft, which was quite delayed from when we should have received that chair's draft, to find the politicisation of the report, with the inclusion of a section on the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund – a fund that we heard nothing about while we were gathering evidence to our inquiry or taking submissions. We did not receive a briefing from the government, and yet that was included in the report. During the deliberations the section that was put in there was watered down.

Jaclyn Symes: On a point of order, President, I will take your guidance. I am not a member of this committee and it has been some time since I was on an upper house committee, but I am fairly confident that detailing deliberations of parliamentary committees, even with parliamentary privilege, is unparliamentary and actually could see you referred to privileges.

The PRESIDENT: I will take your point of order into consideration. Just maybe, members, heed the minister's point of order in contributions.

Wendy LOVELL: I would like to highlight the very good minority report put forward by the Liberals and Nationals, and in particular I would like to draw attention to the fact that we have recommended that any recommendations that are adopted from this should be subject to a regulatory impact statement, because whilst we hear evidence and make recommendations, we are not the experts on the cost to the community of these recommendations.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:25): I am pleased to speak briefly about the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into climate resilience. I do want to thank the chair, the members of the committee and also the secretariat who worked on this inquiry. We visited Wangaratta and Mount Macedon, we went to Emerald and we went to Aireys Inlet, and there were many people that made submissions to this inquiry as well.

Climate resilience is not easy to define. It is very hard, certainly, to achieve – we know we can work towards it, but to achieve it is another thing. We heard about disasters and the impact of natural

disasters. Certainly in the face of natural disasters it is important to build back better, and we heard many talk about that and echo many of the calls that we heard during the flood inquiry. We heard about levees and the Victorian government. We have put forward the need to ensure that levees on Crown land are immediately restored to their original integrity and maintained through a legislated inspection and maintenance program.

We heard a lot about some of these renewable energy projects – about wind turbines and solar panels. We know Colbinabbin has a project that has over 700,000 panels, and we heard about the impact of that heat island effect and the need to look into that and also to look into recycling, because we have hundreds of wind turbines going out into regional areas and solar panels – many, many thousands of them. They have very short life spans of 25 to 30 years, we heard, and at this point there is no plan as to what happens next. We also heard about the significant increase in the cost of building and bushfire overlays adding about 40 per cent to the cost of building. The challenge is always, when you look to ideals to improve things, to balance that with the cost, because we do not want to end up with less houses in Victoria. We need to think long term, and I encourage people to look at the minority report at the back of this inquiry.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 6 August 2025 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Kings Domain Reserve and Alexandra Park Reserve.

Order of 21 June 2025 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Tooradin Foreshore Reserve.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 50 (*Gazette S398, 1 August 2025*).

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

Ballarat Planning Scheme – Amendment C263.

Buloke, Gannawarra, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, Swan Hill and

Yarriambiack Planning Schemes – Amendment GC262.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendment C465.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C160.

Mitchell Planning Scheme – Amendments C158, C161 and C175.

Monash Planning Scheme – Amendment C180.

Nillumbik Planning Scheme – Amendment C149.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendment C282.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme – Amendment C289.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 – No. 74.

Powers of Attorney Act 2014 – No. 73.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 53, 69, 71, 72 and 75.

Petitions

Responses

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Planning's response to a petition titled 'Desist from high-rise, high-density zone planning'.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Committees

Parliamentary Ethics Committee

Membership

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (13:44): I move, by leave:

That Mrs Broad, Mr McIntosh and Mr Welch be members of the Parliamentary Ethics Committee.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

General business

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:45): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 13 August 2025:

- (1) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment (Reporting of Guardianship and Administration Proceedings) Bill 2025;
- (2) order of the day 1, second reading of the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025;
- (3) notice of motion given this day by me on rising energy bills;
- (4) notice of motion given this day by me relating to overdue production of documents orders;
- (5) notice of motion given this day by Georgie Crozier on delivery of health services; and
- (6) notice of motion given this day by David Limbrick on reviewing self-defence laws.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Middle East conflict

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:46): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the use of starvation and the withholding of humanitarian aid as a weapon of war in Gaza in violation of international humanitarian law and resulting in harm to millions of civilians, the majority of whom are women and children;
- (2) notes with grave concern findings from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization that less than 5 per cent of Gaza's cropland remains cultivatable, with over 80 per cent of farmland damaged and nearly 78 per cent inaccessible;
- (3) urges all parties to the conflict to respect international law and prioritise the protection of civilian lives;
- (4) stands in solidarity with all victims of the conflict and with humanitarian workers risking their lives to deliver aid; and

- (5) calls on the Australian government to use all available diplomatic channels to advocate for an immediate ceasefire, the lifting of the siege and the restoration of access to humanitarian assistance.

Leave refused.

Middle East conflict

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:47): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes it has been 675 days since the gruesome 7 October 2023 attacks conducted by Hamas against the people of Israel;
- (2) further notes that according to the Associated Press up to 50 hostages still remain in Gaza, held by Hamas, of whom Israel believes 27 are dead;
- (3) calls on Hamas to immediately release all remaining surviving hostages and return the bodies of those hostages who have been killed;
- (4) insists that the recognition of a Palestinian state should not involve Hamas in a role or position of authority and should under no circumstances proceed until all hostages are returned until the Palestinian Authority is thoroughly reformed and demonstrates it is prepared to accept a Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel and until it is guaranteed a Palestinian state will pose no threat to Israel's security; and
- (5) insists that the recognition of a Palestinian state should only come at the end of a successful peace negotiations process between Israel and the Palestinians.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Croydon Special Developmental School

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:48): Society is judged by how we look after our most vulnerable, so I could not hold back the tears last week when I got to officially open a once-in-a-generation \$11.747 million transformation at Croydon Special Developmental School, a game changer for these very deserving students. Croydon SDS was officially opened by Joan Kirner back in 1985 and had not had significant upgrades and investments to it until now. From a brand new warm-water hydrotherapy pool and a new gym where the students can undertake occupational therapy to a modern library and upgraded administration spaces, this investment will open doors and spark potential for many years to come. I want to thank the school captains Declan and Jamie, students, teachers and parents for their amazing support and love for this very special and deserving school community. It takes a village, and it was a beautiful thing to see everyone so proud of these significant upgrades to this very special school, knowing the difference it will make to the lives of students who attend Croydon Special Developmental School.

Footscray Hospital

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:49): Almost seven years ago Labor promised a new hospital in Footscray at a cost of \$1.5 billion with 504 beds. But again we see where they have been failing: they promised that it would be open in 2025, but this hospital, true to form, has been totally mismanaged by the Labor government – the budget has blown out to \$2 billion and the project timelines have blown out. When it does open, it will not have the 504 beds as promised. It will have instead 284 beds, so that is 220 beds less than promised. In the government's statement, as they often do, they use weasel words. In a report around the opening, the communication strategy was using the words 'consider', 'move', 'settle' and 'growth' rather than instead saying the things are not opening. They use these weasel words. They massage the community, promise the world and never deliver on time. We see that in the community hospitals also promised in Cranbourne and Craigieburn. Again, these facilities are not operating. They lie vacant and not operational. This government talks the big game, but it continues to fail to deliver. They cannot manage money and cannot manage health, and it is Victorians who are paying the price.

Albury Wodonga Health

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (13:51): On Sunday I attended a rally in the north-east of my electorate in Corryong with concerned community members in protest against the government's proposed refurbishment of Albury Wodonga Health. The mayors from Towong shire, Wodonga council and Albury City Council were also in attendance to support the Albury Wodonga Health catchment area communities. There I met Harry, a lovely young man aged only 12, who last year suffered a broken femur in a farming accident. Instead of a helicopter flying him to Albury where he could receive care, he was flown to Canberra. In his own state he could not receive care or a bed or the facility to land a chopper in nearby Albury–Wodonga. This will still be the case if the state and New South Wales continue on with their plans instead of committing to the vital greenfield site for a new hospital in Wodonga. This year Harry's grandfather became ill with blood poisoning and was taken to Albury via ambulance. He was ramped for 5 hours there. In those 5 hours he lost the vital window to address his issue, be operated on and potentially have his life saved. Instead, when he was finally given a bed his family were called and told they had mere hours to say their goodbyes. Our incompetent Minister for Health is blatantly ignoring the desperate pleas of my constituents for a vital service they deserve. If she is incapable of representing the health requirements of Victorians, then she should step aside. Give the role to somebody who at least possesses an ounce of compassion.

Housing

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:52): My first matter is a huge thankyou to the Minister for Planning in the other place, Minister Kilkenny, and Aware Super for inviting me to their topping out ceremony yesterday on Queens Road. It was great to join the member for Albert Park to see all the construction work they are doing there, and I thank the Minister for Planning for her important words on the importance of projects like this for our community members, creating livable, affordable rentals close to public transport and open spaces.

Boroondara City Council

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:53): On my second matter, last week I joined Mr Batchelor and the member for Ashwood in the other place for a productive discussion with Boroondara council. Thank you to the mayor of Boroondara Sophie Torney for getting us all together. I have enjoyed working with the mayor on important local projects like creating more open green living spaces. I am looking forward to working with Mayor Torney over the next few months to support our local traders and roads.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:53): Finally, I would like to thank all the staff on the Legislative Council's economy and infrastructure team. I am always impressed by your dedication to your craft, and I want to acknowledge your efforts on the public hearing in Bendigo last week.

Education system

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:53): Parents should have the right to choose high-quality schools where their children will be instructed in line with their family's world view, so it is no surprise that parents are voting with their feet by enrolling their children in low-fee Christian schools, the fastest growing schools in the sector today. Recently, Christian Education National's Narelle Sketcher briefed me on their priorities. In the face of systemic behavioural issues, many Christian schools are a shining light, instilling positive values and behavioural boundaries. This approach builds resilience in students, empowering them to become responsible citizens. Many schools have open enrolments, welcoming students from various faith backgrounds, but they do not want the state to improperly interfere in their hiring practices. They want staff that will believe, teach and live by their world view. Schools fear that the disastrous school tax will eventually capture low-fee schools through bracket creep or legislative change. That is why the Victorian Liberals will not just reform this tax, we will rip it up and chuck it out.

Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:54): Lastly, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority is creating enormous bureaucratic delays. New schools are forced to borrow and invest in land and staff before their registration is finalised, generating massive financial and legal liabilities. Clearly a review is needed to create a better understanding of these schools and remove burdensome red tape.

Greyhound racing

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:55): Recently I received a very positive and welcome letter sharing the news that most greyhound racing tracks in the United States have now closed their doors. That letter was co-signed by 14 American lawmakers, including federal senators and Congress and state representatives from both major parties. They outlined how what was once a widespread industry across 19 states has been reduced to just two operational tracks in West Virginia. The letter told me:

... the effort to end dog racing and help protect greyhounds has been a remarkably bipartisan effort.

Specific animal welfare concerns about injury, neglect, doping and the killing of healthy dogs deemed no longer profitable were central to these lawmakers' case for reform. They also wrote that America is:

... not only outlawing greyhound racing itself, we are ending remote wagering on dog races, including Australian races.

The closure of dog tracks has also proven to be an economic opportunity, they tell me, as former racing tracks are repurposed in ways that benefit local communities – housing, schools, municipal facilities and more. If the United States, a country with such a long history of greyhound racing, can move decisively in a bipartisan way towards ending it, then Victoria can and should follow suit. It is time we all put the welfare of dogs ahead of gambling profits. In fact just this weekend the Tasmanian government has also announced it will end its funding for greyhound racing in the state by 2029, effectively winding up the industry. It is way past time that here in Victoria we do the same.

Daffodil Day

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (13:56): I rise to mark Daffodil Day on Thursday 21 August, a day of hope, remembrance and unity for every Victorian touched by cancer. Cancer does not discriminate; it affects families and communities of every age, background and health. Daffodil Day is our chance to stand together, remember those we have lost, support those still fighting and fuel the research that will save lives. The Cancer Council's work is extraordinary, funding life-saving research, delivering prevention programs and supporting patients and families through their toughest days. Yet cancer remains one of Australia's leading causes of death, and diagnoses are expected to rise by 22 per cent by 2031. Continued investment and bipartisan support are vital. As a member for Western Victoria, I am proud of our government's commitment to world-class cancer care not just in major hospitals but right across regional and rural communities. This year I will wear my daffodil badge with pride and encourage all Victorians to do the same.

Sheepvention

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (13:57): On another note, I congratulate the Hamilton Pastoral and Agricultural Society on another outstanding Sheepvention. Their passion and dedication ensure this much-loved rural expo continues to grow and showcase the agricultural heart of western Victoria.

Glen Waverley Primary School

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:57): Last week I went to Glen Waverley Primary School, whose chess club won the prestigious Northern Star primary open zonal chess

championship. To celebrate that I challenged the chess club to a game of chess, only to be confronted with 20 simultaneous games of chess to be played, which was frankly exhausting, and without question I got smashed – they smashed me. It was very humbling, but I will be back. I want to congratulate the school. I want to congratulate principal Frank Catalano on what an incredibly talented group of young people he has at the school.

Koonung Secondary College

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:58): In a similar vein, I also had the pleasure of attending Koonung Secondary College's school musical, which this year was *Chicago*. Now, *Chicago* is a difficult musical to put on because you have to have the choreography right, you have to have the music right, you have to have the singing right and you have to have the acting right, and they nailed it – they absolutely nailed it. It was an extraordinarily high-quality performance, and I congratulate the school and all the teachers and all the performers on the incredibly hard work that must have gone into that.

Surrey Park Football Club

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:59): To finish off, I had the pleasure of attending Surrey Park Football Club on their sponsors day at Surrey Park reserve in Box Hill, and I was very pleased to bring along leader Brad Battin. We had a very good day of footy and pies.

Health system

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:59): 'I just can't afford to ask the questions about my health I should, and when I do I end up stuck in limbo waiting for specialist services'; 'Teeth are bad and suffer from conditions that are easily treated through medication but just can't afford the cost or time off work'; 'Haven't properly managed mental health issue as it's been too expensive to continue to see a psychologist': this is just a snapshot of what I have heard recently from countless people across my electorate. Communities across western Victoria are overwhelmingly struggling to access the health care they need when they need it. In Victoria the cost of health care should not impact your quality of life, but for so, so many this is a reality. In fact in a recent survey of my electorate 90 per cent of people let me know that health services are too expensive. Bulk-billing GPs, psychologists and dental care were among the most common healthcare professionals that people had trouble accessing. This is basic health care. It is fundamental to wellbeing, physical and emotional, and the fact that the Allan Labor government continues to pour money into the grand prix, arms manufacturing and fossil fuel subsidies rather than ensuring that health services are affordable is completely bewildering. Overwhelmingly people want access to free dental, free GPs and more affordable mental health care. These are things that could be delivered through greater investment and expansion of community health centres, and it is about time this government delivered.

Transport infrastructure

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:00): In recently leaked recordings the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop Harriet Shing revealed the truth about how growth suburbs in Melbourne's north and west have been totally abandoned by the Allan Labor government. Minister Shing admitted that while the outer western and outer northern suburbs have been shackled with the burden of the city's population expansion, Labor has not delivered the essential infrastructure needed to support residents to travel around their suburbs with ease or commute into the city. Minister Shing confessed that residents in those suburbs spend hours stuck in traffic while trying to get to work or to go shopping, a clear admission that Labor has totally failed my constituents in the northern suburbs, especially around Donnybrook and Kalkallo. Even worse, Labor has no plan to actually deal with the traffic crisis in the area, which has been created by Labor's own reckless approach to approving developments. Labor is greedy to collect stamp duty and property taxes but will not invest that money in duplicating Donnybrook Road or commit to electrifying the train line up to Wallan.

The Labor government has just announced another mega suburb of 50,000 people in Beveridge but will not commit to the funds to build a new train station in Beveridge. This is a recipe for disaster. Roads will be clogged and trains will be jam-packed, with people left standing on the platform running late for work. Under this reckless plan transport infrastructure in the area will be crippled for another decade, and Labor has no plan to fix it.

Middle East conflict

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:02): I think we are at a very difficult point in Australia's relationship with Israel. I think the Prime Minister has made the wrong decision, and I think foreign minister Penny Wong's extreme pro-Palestinian position is a concern. I think this has happened because people have believed there are legitimate questions about how the activities in Gaza have been conducted, and no government or no military is beyond legitimate questioning. However, I think we have to step back and say Israel has been under permanent threat for a very long period. The terrible happenings on 7 October 2024 should not be forgotten. We should not forget the fears that are there and the need to deal with Hamas, a recognised terrorist organisation. I do not believe there should be recognition with Hamas in place. I do not believe that there should be recognition until every hostage is returned, and that is not the way the Australian government is saying this. The Australian government is pointing at Israel. They should be pointing at Hamas. They should be pointing at the failures of the Palestinian Authority. The fact is that Australia and Israel should be friends, and we have been for so many years. I think this government is taking an opportunity to work against Israel, and it is wrong.

Bills

Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (14:04): I have got a message from the Legislative Assembly on the Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Serious Offenders Act 2018**, the **Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004** and the **Corrections Act 1986** and for other purposes' the amendment made by the Council has been agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:04): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1016, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

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

Statement of compatibility

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:05): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The main purposes of the Bill are:

- to amend the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* (**NEVA**) by:
 - making further provision in relation to the operation and governance of the statutory body corporate VicGrid (**VicGrid**);
 - transferring the functions and powers of the CEO VicGrid under the Act to VicGrid;
 - modifying the *National Electricity (Victoria) Law* (**National Law**), the *National Electricity (Victoria) Regulations* (**Regulations**), as they apply as laws of Victoria, and the *National Electricity Rules* (**Rules**), as they have the force of law in Victoria, so that VicGrid is conferred the Victorian declared network functions under that Law and the Regulations and Rules;
 - transferring certain functions of AEMO under Orders in Council under the Act to VicGrid;
 - providing for the issue of grid impact authorities or REZ scheme authorities by VicGrid to certain persons wishing to establish connections to the Victorian declared transmission system for generating systems and integrated resource systems or making changes to existing facilities connected to the Victorian declared transmission system;
 - providing for VicGrid to establish and maintain the REZ Community Energy Fund and the Traditional Owners Fund under which supports and benefits will be provided to Victorian communities and traditional owners;
 - providing for reviews of the community benefits framework;
 - transferring certain property, rights and liabilities of the State relating to the CEO VicGrid functions and powers to VicGrid; and
 - transferring certain property, rights and liabilities of the Australian Energy Market Operator (**AEMO**) relating to its Victorian declared network functions to VicGrid;
- to amend the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (**EI Act**) by:
 - exempting VicGrid from the requirement to hold a licence under that Act to transmit electricity;
 - providing for the acquisition of easements in gross by electricity corporations;
 - introducing a new compliance and enforcement regime that provides additional land entry powers to facilitate the exercise of existing land access and works powers under that Act; and
- to amend *Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993* to repeal a provision relating to the acquisition of easements in gross by electricity corporations.

Human rights issues

The Bill may limit the following human rights: privacy (s 13(a)); freedom of expression (s 15(2)); property (s 20); fair hearing (s 24(1)); and protection against self-incrimination (s 25(2)(k)).

The Bill also promotes a range of human rights under the Charter. This includes promoting First Nations cultural rights (s 19(2)) by establishing the Traditional Owners Fund to confer benefits to Traditional Owners impacted by the construction and operation of system infrastructure, and by requiring grid impact authority holders and REZ authority holders to consult and engage with Traditional Owners. By preserving existing protections in the National Law, such as the protected information provisions, the Bill provides safeguards against the disclosure of personal information, thus promoting the right to privacy (s 13(a)). Finally, the overarching objective of the Bill is to support Victoria's renewable energy transition and investment in the transmission network, aimed at alleviating the effects of climate change, which promote the right to life (s 9).

Therefore, to the extent that the Bill limits any Charter rights, such limits are reasonable and justifiable in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Protected information provisions

Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new section 16ZS into the NEVA, which modifies the application of Div 6 of Part 5 of the National Law. This Division sets out a regime for the use and disclosure of 'protected information'. New section 16ZS of the NEVA inserts new subsection 54(1a) into the National Law, which provides that VicGrid must take all reasonable measures to ensure it does not make unauthorised use or disclosure of protected information. This new provision also expands the definition of protected information to include any information that has been given to VicGrid in confidence, or in connection with the performance of a REZ planning function; a landholder payment function; or a statutory function and is

prescribed to be confidential information. Accordingly, the effect of the above amendments is to extend the application of this confidentiality regime to include VicGrid.

New section 16ZS of the NEVA modifies the operation of section 54A of the National Law, providing that VicGrid is only authorised to disclose protected information in accordance with Subdivision 2 of Div 6 or the Rules or Regulations. As such, protected information may only be disclosed in specified circumstances and to specified recipients. For example, with the prior written consent of the person from whom the information was obtained (amended s 54B), where disclosure is required or permitted by law or to specified regulatory and integrity bodies, e.g., the Australian Energy Regulator (amended s 54C), for the purposes of court and tribunal proceedings (amended s 54D), or if necessary for the safety, reliability, or security of electricity supply or the national electricity system (inserted s 54G(2a)(a), or if necessary for the proper operation of the market (inserted s 54G(2a)(b)). Additionally, VicGrid may impose conditions in relation to protected information disclosed to specified regulatory and integrity bodies under amended section 54C. Further, after the restricted period has expired, amended section 54H provides that the disclosure of protected information is only authorised if doing so outweighs any detriment to the person who has given it or from whom that person received it.

Additionally, amended section 54E of the National Law requires the omission of protected information from any disclosed documents that would otherwise contain such information. Similarly, amended section 54F precludes VicGrid from disclosing protected information if the report identifies or names an individual, or contains information that enables an individual to be identified.

Further, Division 2 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new sections 55A and 55B into the NEVA, which authorise VicGrid to withhold protected information from the Treasurer and Minister and from biannual reports and prescribed financial statements subject to certain exemptions (amended ss 55A(3), 55B(3) and 55C(3)), thereby overriding the requirements that would otherwise apply to the VicGrid board as a State business corporation under sections 53, 55(1) and 55(2) of the *State Owned Enterprise Act 1992*. New section 55H additionally provides that a document that contains protected information within the meaning of the National Law is an exempt document for the purposes of section 38 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Freedom of expression and privacy

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. The right to freedom of expression in section 15 of the Charter has been interpreted as encompassing a right to access information in the possession of government bodies, at least where an individual seeks information in which they have a legitimate interest or on a subject engaging the public interest.

However, section 15(3) provides that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. This is a very broad right protecting a number of personal matters, relevantly a person's informational privacy. Where personal information is collected, the right extends to providing the person with control over that information, including how the information is used. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

These amendments may engage the right to freedom of expression under section 15(2) of the Charter by limiting a person's right to access information about matters of a public interest. They may also engage the right to privacy under section 13(a) of the Charter by authorising the disclosure of personal information. However, the obligation to maintain the confidentiality of protected information already exists in relation to the performance of the declared network functions in Victoria such that the Bill effectively transfers this obligation from AEMO to VicGrid.

Further, these provisions balance the public interest with the need to maintain the confidentiality of protected information. For example, amended section 54G of the National Law permits disclosure only where necessary for the safety, reliability or security of electricity supply and the proper operation of the market, while amended section 54H authorises the disclosure of protected information only if doing so outweighs any detriment to the discloser. Further, amended section 54C ensures that regulatory and other bodies with a legitimate interest can access and use information that is connected with the performance of their functions or the exercise of their powers. By maintaining the imposition of strict limits on the disclosure of protected information these amendments strike an appropriate balance between important objectives such as the protection of the safety and privacy of individuals, and the regulation and operation of the electricity system.

I, therefore, consider that any interference with privacy is proportionate to the above legitimate purposes such that these amendments go no further than necessary to achieve them.

While the restrictions upon the ability to access information in the possession of VicGrid imposes limits on the right to freedom of expression, these limits are reasonably necessary to protect the confidentiality of information and the privacy of individuals whose personal information is disclosed to VicGrid as well as the security, effective operation and regulation of the electricity market in Victoria. For example, the disclosure of information obtained for the purpose of REZ planning, which many include sensitive decisions concerning land use and Traditional Owner cultural heritage information, would affect VicGrid's ability to deliver its functions by undermining stakeholders' willingness to provide sensitive information and VicGrid's ability to obtain such information in the future. It is, therefore, necessary to extend the scope of the secrecy provisions to VicGrid's REZ planning functions. As such, these provisions promote the rights to privacy and reputation under s 13. Given these important objectives, I consider that any limitations imposed on this right are either within the internal limits of section 15(3) or are reasonably justified and proportionate in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Information gathering powers

Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new Part 3A into the NEVA, which modifies the application of the National Law in Victoria. Specifically, new section 16ZR extends the application of the existing information gathering powers of AEMO in Div 5 of Part 5 of the National Law. In so doing, it empowers VicGrid to make general market information orders or serve market information notices that respectively require information from persons of a class specified in the order, or the person to whom the notice is addressed, if VicGrid considers it reasonably necessary for the exercise of a relevant function (amended s 53, National Law). Further, failure to comply with such order or notice is punishable by a civil penalty (amended s 53C(3)–(4), National Law). Additionally, under new section 68A of the NEVA, the knowing provision of false or misleading information in purported compliance with a market information order or notice is also subject to a criminal penalty.

Right to protection against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

To the extent that the mandatory disclosure of prescribed market information is potentially incriminating, these amendments may engage the right in section 25(2)(k) of the Charter. However, these powers are subject to the existing exceptions in section 53C(6) of the National Law, where a person cannot be required to disclose information that is the subject of legal professional privilege, would incriminate the person or make them liable to a criminal penalty. Further, before making a general market information order or serving a market information notice, VicGrid must give the relevant persons an opportunity to make written representations about whether VicGrid should make the order or serve the notice, which it must consider before making a final decision (amended ss 53A and 53B, National Law). Therefore, the Bill preserves the existing protections against self-incrimination as far as possible.

To the extent that the protection against self-incrimination is abrogated in circumstances by these compulsive powers and penalty provisions, I consider that any limitation to the right under s 25(2)(k) is justified having regard to the purposes of the information gathering powers. For these reasons, I consider the Bill is compatible with section 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

Review of information disclosure decisions

Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new section 16ZX into the NEVA, which amends the definition of 'information disclosure decision' in section 71A of the National Law, to include a decision to disclose information made by VicGrid under section 54H, other than a decision to disclose information given to VicGrid in connection with the performance of a REZ planning function or a landholder payment function. As persons aggrieved by an information disclosure decision are otherwise entitled under the National Law to apply to the Australian Competition Tribunal for merits review of this decision, the effect of this amendment is to provide no access to merits review for disclosure decisions relating to REZ planning and landholder payment functions. Accordingly, this amendment may be relevant to the fair hearing right.

Fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter relevantly provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers but may

encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. While recognising the broad scope of s 24(1), the term ‘proceeding’ and ‘party’ suggest that s 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties. As the administrative decisions at issue here do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, there is a question as to whether the right to a fair hearing is engaged.

In any event, if a broad reading of s 24(1) is adopted and it is understood that the fair hearing right is engaged by this Bill, this right would nonetheless not be limited. The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision and the right may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. The entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited. In the context where merits review is not provided, an administrative decision-making procedure may still be compatible with fair hearing if the procedure is consistent with affording natural justice, and judicial review is available to ensure the decision was lawfully made.

I am satisfied that the fair hearing right is not limited, because VicGrid’s decision to disclose protected information under amended section 54H of the National Law provides affected persons with initial and further disclosure notices, which inform of VicGrid’s intention to disclose the information, specify the nature of the intended disclosure and state VicGrid’s reasons for doing so. Additionally, amended section 54H affords affected persons with a reasonable opportunity to make representations against the disclosure in response to the notices.

Accordingly, the exclusion of merits review under the Bill will not interfere with the right to a fair hearing, because the opportunities to be heard under the National Law are preserved, ensuring that, overall, interested parties will have access to a fair process. Further, all information disclosure decisions made by VicGrid will remain subject to judicial review (existing section 70 of the National Law). As such, I conclude that the fair hearing rights in section 24(1) of the Charter are not limited by the provisions referred to above.

Immunities

Division 2 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new section 55E(1) into the NEVA, which provides immunity from civil monetary liability to VicGrid and its officers or employees for an act or omission in the purported or actual performance or exercise of any of VicGrid’s functions or powers, unless the act or omission was done or made in bad faith or through negligence.

New section 55F of the NEVA further provides that VicGrid or its officers or employees do not incur any civil monetary liability for any partial or total failure to supply electricity unless the failure is due to an act or omission done or made in bad faith or through negligence. New section 55G similarly provides that VicGrid, its officers, employees or agents incur no civil monetary liability for loss or damage suffered in consequence of the use of computer software to operate the national electricity market.

Further, new section 55E(2) limits the quantum of civil monetary liability for an act or omission done or made negligently in relation to the exercise of any of VicGrid’s functions or powers, to the prescribed amount. The regulations may prescribe the maximum liability amount.

Insofar as a cause of action may be considered ‘property’ within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, these provisions may engage the right. However, as the National Law already exempts AEMO from liability for acts and omissions done or made in good faith and without negligence, and provides AEMO with limited liability in respect of negligent actions, the effect of these provisions is to extend existing immunities to VicGrid, such that they do not remove existing legal rights (ie those rights were removed by a previous enactment).

Additionally, the immunity provisions are drafted in clear and precise terms, are publicly accessible, and does not operate arbitrarily. As such, any deprivation occasioned by these provisions will be ‘in accordance with law’.

Further, any deprivation of a cause of action is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring that AEMO and VicGrid’s officers and employees can effectively perform their functions and exercise their powers without the threat of significant personal repercussions. The scope of the immunity is also limited to good faith actions and does not extend to include negligence – such that it is proportionate to the legitimate aim sought. Additionally, these immunity provisions may be varied or excluded by agreement (new sections 55E(3) and 55F(2)–(3)). As such, there are no less restrictive means of achieving the Bill’s objectives. Accordingly, the relevant immunity is, in my view, appropriately granted.

The limited liability provision for negligent actions (new s 55E(2)) could also be considered to deprive a person of property through the imposition of quantum limits. However, any such deprivation will also be ‘in accordance with law’ and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. That is, any interference with the property right will be governed by a clear and publicly accessible process set out in the Bill and regulations.

Further, this provision strikes an appropriate balance between the need to provide just compensation for harm and to safeguard the financial viability of VicGrid, such that it is appropriately tailored and the least restrictive means to achieve the legitimate aim sought. Exposure to these types of liability will make VicGrid's statutory functions very difficult, or prohibitively costly, to perform. The cost of electricity outages can range from hundreds of millions to billions of dollars depending on their duration. If a utility was liable for the consequences of even a minor event, this could result in insolvency and the instability of the national electricity grid.

These provisions do not place new or additional burden on consumers or take away rights. The National Electricity (Victoria) Law already exempts AEMO from liability for acts and omissions done or made in good faith and without negligence, and provides AEMO with limited liability in respect of negligent actions, the effect of these provisions is to extend existing immunities to VicGrid, such that they do not remove existing legal rights (ie those rights were removed by a previous enactment).

Finally, in prescribing the quantum of the limit on damages, the Minister will need to certify a Human Rights Certificate on the compatibility with Charter rights of the amount decided upon. For these reasons, I consider that new section 55D does not engage the right in section 20.

Grid impact authorities and REZ scheme authorities

Division 6 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new Division 2A into the NEVA, which establishes a scheme for the issue by VicGrid of grid impact authorities, which will be required by persons, known as Connection Applicants, who wish to establish a connection from their generating system or integrated resource system to the declared transmission system if:

- the connection is outside a REZ; or
- within a REZ and their system is a technology type not specified as eligible in a REZ scheme declaration; or
- within a REZ and the system is part of a facility that is predominantly located outside a REZ.

Grid impact authorities will also be required by generators or Integrated Resource Providers that wish to carry out a system change to a generating system or integrated resource system they own, operate or control if:

- the system is part of a facility connected to the declared transmission system outside a REZ; or
- the system is part of an eligible facility connected to the declared transmission system within a REZ.

Importantly, Division 6 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts new s 33F into the NEVA, which allows VicGrid to revoke a grid impact authority if it is of the view that the grid impact authority holder has not complied with a condition to which the grid impact pass authority is subject.

Further, Division 6 of Part 2 of the Bill also inserts new Division 2C into the NEVA, which sets out the framework for the issue of REZ scheme authorities by VicGrid. These authorities will be required by Connection Applicants who wish to connect an eligible generating system or eligible integrated resource system to the declared transmission system in a REZ and by Generators or Integrated Resource Providers who wish to carry out a system change to an eligible facility within a REZ. New Division 2C includes new section 33Q which enables VicGrid to revoke a REZ scheme authority if VicGrid is of the view that the REZ scheme authority holder has not complied with a condition to which the REZ scheme authority is subject.

Finally, Division 6 of Part 2 inserts new section 33S into the NEVA, which provides that a REZ scheme authority cannot be transferred without VicGrid consent. It then inserts new section 33T which steps out the process for a REZ scheme authority holder to apply for VicGrid to consent to the transfer of their REZ scheme authority to another person, and the process for VicGrid to approve or deny the transfer application. Under new section 33T(3), in making a decision, VicGrid must have regard to any matters that are prescribed, and under new section 33T(4), VicGrid must refuse to consent to a transfer of the REZ scheme authority to another person if it is satisfied that the transfer would not be in the public interest.

Both grid impact authority and REZ scheme authority applications must be accompanied by a consultation and engagement plan relating to a process for consultation with impacted communities and traditional owners. The consultation and engagement plan may be approved by VicGrid in granting the authority, and it is then a condition of the authority that these plans be complied with, including the implementation of a complaint handling system and dispute resolution process (new ss 33A(2)(b) and (3), 33B(3), 33C(1)(b), 33K(3) and (4), 33L(3), and 33N(1)(b)). Accordingly, the Bill promotes First Nations cultural rights, which are protected by s 19(2) of the Charter.

Fair hearing

In relation to decisions to issue or renew a licence, unless a decision determines existing rights, it is understood the fair hearing right is unlikely to apply. Accordingly, VicGrid's power to revoke a grid impact authority or REZ scheme authority (the **authorities**) – which are similar to a licence – in new sections 33F and 33Q, revokes an existing interest and therefore could engage the right to fair hearing.

The Bill applies various procedural fairness safeguards to a decision to revoke an authority, including the requirement that notice of the proposed decision be provided to the authority holder, which must include the grounds for the proposed revocation (new ss 33F(2)(a) and 33Q(2)(a)), and also invite the authority holder to make written submissions as to why the authority should not be revoked (new ss 33F(2)(b) and 33Q(2)(b)). VicGrid must take into account any submissions made in making its decision regarding revocation (new ss 33F(3) and 33Q(3)). Once the decision to revoke has been made, VicGrid will then be required to give reasons to the authority holder as to why it is revoking the authority (new ss 33F(5)(a) and 33Q(5)(a)) and provide notice as to when the revocation will take effect (new ss 33F(5)(b) and 33Q(5)(b)). The authority holder has a right of judicial review of the lawfulness of the decision.

In view of above safeguards, and the fact that the ability to revoke an authority due to a failure to comply with its conditions is an important regulatory function, I do not consider that the fair hearing right has been limited.

I am therefore of the view that these amendments, and in particular new sections 33F and 33Q, are compatible with the right to fair hearing under the Charter.

Right to property

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

The restriction on the transfer of REZ scheme authorities provided by new sections 33S and 33T, such that VicGrid may refuse to consent to a transfer, may engage the right to property under section 20 of the Charter.

While the definition of 'property' has not been extensively considered by Victorian courts, the concept may incorporate statutory rights that have the characteristics of traditional property, including transferability, as well as non-traditional rights such as licences. Accordingly, a REZ scheme authority, akin to a type of licence to connect a generating system or integrated resource system to the declared transmission system in a REZ, and which has economic value, may constitute property for the purposes of section 20 of the Charter, when the scope of the right is interpreted broadly.

For property rights to be limited, any interference must constitute a deprivation of property. International jurisprudence indicates that a deprivation of property will extend to include a substantial restriction on a person's use or enjoyment of their property, which may include a restriction on a person's ability to dispose of or transfer their property. Assuming that a broad interpretation of 'deprivation of property' is accepted by the courts, the restriction on the transfer of a REZ scheme authority may in fact constitute a deprivation of property.

However, any such deprivation would be in 'accordance with law' and therefore not constitute a limit on property rights under the Charter. New section 33S of the NEVA is clearly drafted and accessible, such that it enables Victorians to regulate their conduct in accordance with the provision. Accordingly, I am satisfied that new section 33S and does not limit the property right under section 20 of the Charter.

Transfer of property, rights and liabilities

Division 10 of Part 2 of the Bill, which inserts Parts 10 and 11 into the NEVA, provides that all property, rights and liabilities of the Crown or AEMO, wherever located, which are specified under an allocation statement, vest in VicGrid in accordance with the statement. The transfer of these property rights are to remain subject to any encumbrances in effect at the time of transfer (Divisions 2 and 3 of Part 10). Similarly, these Divisions provide that all property, rights and liabilities of AEMO that relate to AEMO's Victorian network functions, which are specified under an allocation statement, vest in VicGrid in accordance with the statement.

Further, VicGrid is substituted for the Crown in any proceedings pending or existing in any court, tribunal or arbitration to which the Crown was a party and that relate to former Crown property (Division 2 of Part 10, NEVA.) Similarly, VicGrid is substituted in any proceedings pending or existing in any court or tribunal to which the CEO VicGrid or the Administrative Office of VicGrid were a party (Division 2 of Part 10, NEVA). VicGrid is also substituted in any proceedings pending or existing in any court, tribunal or by a dispute resolution panel to which AEMO was a party, or in any court, tribunal or arbitration to which AEMO was a party and that relate to former AEMO property (Division 3 of Part 10, NEVA). Additionally, VicGrid is liable for any criminal fine in respect of any offence of which AEMO was a convicted and committed in the

performance of a Victorian network function, and any civil penalty in respect of a breach or contravention of a civil penalty provision by AEMO in performing a Victorian network function, as specified under an allocation statement (Division 3 of Part 10, NEVA). Division 10 of Part 2 of the Bill also inserts a new definition, which defines property to mean ‘any legal or equitable estate or interest (whether present or future and whether vested or contingent) in real or personal property of any description’; liabilities to mean ‘all liabilities, duties and obligations, whether actual, contingent or prospective’; and rights to mean ‘all rights, powers, privileges and immunities, whether actual, contingent or prospective’.

Right to property

The transfer of any of the Crown’s property, rights and liabilities to VicGrid is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the property or liability transferred. However, the transfer will not limit the property rights of persons holding the interest as they are not being deprived of their interest. Rather, the property or liability is transferred from the Crown to a statutory body without altering the substantive content of that property right or liability.

Insofar as a cause of action in relation to any potential liability held by the Crown may be considered ‘property’ within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, the Bill may engage this right. However, in my opinion, the Bill does not effect a deprivation of property as it does not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against the Crown, CEO VicGrid or the Administrative Office of VicGrid. Rather, liability is transferred to VicGrid.

Finally, even if the Bill could be considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation would be ‘in accordance with law’ and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. In particular, the new provisions of the NEVA dealing with the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from the Crown to VicGrid, as outlined above, are drafted in clear and precise terms, and are sufficiently accessible to allow persons to regulate their own conduct in relation to them. Accordingly, the Bill to transfer the property to VicGrid does not limit this Charter right.

Acquisition of easements in gross

Right to property

As above, for the purposes of section 20 of the Charter, ‘property’ includes all real property interests recognised under the general law. An easement is a real property interest, and any acquisition of an easement will therefore interfere with the property right of persons whose interest in land is affected. Division 2 of Part 3 of the Bill amends the EI Act to recognise easements in gross acquired by an electricity corporation even though there is no land vested in the corporation. Part 4 of the Bill repeals the equivalent provision from the *Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993* and principally re-enacts the substance of that provision into the EI Act. This amendment is not a limitation on the property right in the Charter because it is a process under the EI Act in relation to acquisition of easements which is logical and rational. The amendments does not provide an additional new powers to acquire easements as it is already covered by section 86 of the EI Act, therefore the right in section 20 of the Charter is not limited.

New land entry powers

Division 3 of Part 3 of the Bill inserts new Division 3 into Part 5 of the EI Act, which grants land access powers to authorised officers for the purposes of facilitating access for electricity corporations to enter land and undertake functions under existing section 93(1). The Division introduces a new compliance and enforcement regime that enables authorised officers, accompanied by officers of electricity corporations to enter private land without owner or occupier consent. These powers provide a hierarchy of options that scale in the extent of their interference with rights:

- at the lower end of the scale are further statutory powers of entry (new subdivision 3, specifically new s 93BC);
- at the higher end are entry powers that can only be exercised pursuant to a court order (new subdivision 4, specifically new s 93BG).

Further statutory powers of entry

New section 93BC provides authorised officers with the power to enter any land for the purposes of exercising, or facilitating the exercise by another person, of the land entry and works powers under existing section 93(1). Section 93(1) authorises entry onto land to undertake works (e.g., make surveys, construct any works, or place any structure or equipment). Thus, whilst the new powers do not of themselves authorise the conduct of works, they enable their use in a broader range of circumstances, if authorised under section 93(1) of the EI Act.

Powers of entry in accordance with court order

New section 93BH provides that an authorised officer may apply to the Magistrates' Court for an entry order for various grounds, including that entry to the land in accordance with sections 93 or 93BC, or the exercise of a power under section 93 in respect of that land, has previously been refused, hindered, delayed or obstructed. The Magistrates' Court may grant an entry order if satisfied on the evidence, that there are reasonable grounds for making the order (new s 93BJ(1)).

An order issued under new section 93BJ authorises the named authorised officer to use reasonable force to gain entry if it is reasonably necessary to do so, including to remove any obstruction. Under new sections 93BG and 93BM, owners and occupiers of the land subject to such an order, and every other person, are prohibited from obstructing, hindering or delaying the entry of the authorised officer and any person (who belongs to a class) specified in the order, or any authorised activities undertaken pursuant to the authorised entry. The order also empowers authorised officers to give a warning or direction if they reasonably believe that a person is hindering, obstructing or delaying their entry onto land (new s 93BP). Therefore, the Bill introduces a number of new offences to facilitate entry and the undertaking of the section 93 functions.

Powers under both entry authorities

If authorised to enter land under sections 93BC or 93BG, an authorised officer may direct any person who is on that land to state their name and address and provide evidence of their ownership or right of occupation, if the officer believes the person is committing, or has committed, a specified offence (new s 93BO). Further, if a person states a name and address in response to this direction that an authorised officer suspects on reasonable grounds to be false, the officer may direct the person to produce evidence of their name or address. Non compliance with both provisions, without reasonable excuse, is an offence. These powers engage the privacy right in section 13(a) and the right to freedom of expression in section 15(2) (by compelling a person to impart information).

Works powers

Division 1 of Part 3 includes VicGrid into the definition of an electricity corporation for the purposes of Part 5 of the EI Act. Division 4 of Part 3 of the Bill amends the EI Act to temporarily confer works powers on the CEO VicGrid or their authorised representative. The effect of these amendments are to extend to CEO VicGrid (for the interim between Royal Assent and the transfer of functions from CEO VicGrid to VicGrid), and VicGrid thereafter, existing powers of electricity corporations to enter land and undertake works under section 93(1) of the EI Act.

Right to privacy and freedom of expression

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

- Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. However, section 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality. To the extent that the compulsive power to require an owner or occupier's name, address and proof of ownership or right to occupancy under section 93BO requires a person to provide personal information, this may interfere with the person's right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter. This provision also engages the right to freedom of expression in section 15(2) of the Charter, by compelling a person to impart information.
- However, in my view, any interference with these rights would not be arbitrary or unlawful. This is because establishing a person's identity is an essential pre-requisite to the proper and lawful discharge of enforcement powers and as such, the Bill serves the legitimate purpose of ensuring that authorised officers are able to enforce offences provided for under the Bill. It is common regulatory power for authorised officers exercising entry powers to require basic information establishing identity, ownership or occupancy. Further, this provision is subject to safeguards, namely the reasonable excuse exception (new s 93BO(2) and (5)). Therefore, I consider that these powers are proportionate to give effect to the legitimate purpose of the Bill so as to be compatible with sections 13(a) or 15(2) of the Charter.

Further, a person's 'home' includes a person's place of residence. Therefore, entry onto private land may, depending on the type and use of the private property, constitute an interference with the privacy of home.

As entry powers will be restricted to entry onto land rather than residential premises or buildings (new s 93BC(2)), there is generally a lesser expectation of privacy. While the nature of interference may be less severe than an entry into a person's private residence (e.g., inside their home), the conduct of any works on

private land will increase the extent of the interference. For example, entry onto private land for the purpose of constructing infrastructure is likely to amount to a deprivation of an occupier's right to exercise autonomy over their property. Works may also limit an occupant's quiet enjoyment of their home owing to the temporary establishment and storage of plant, machinery, equipment, or temporary structures on their land, and to nuisances such as noise from the operation of such plant, machinery or equipment.

This being so, any interference with a property owner's privacy of home occasioned by this Bill is lawful and not arbitrary as it is authorised by legislation and subject to various statutory limitations. The power to enter land under new section 93BC is subject to a range of procedural safeguards, including obligations of authorised officers to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the entry onto the land is no more disruptive than is reasonably necessary and that they, and any person who accompanies them under section 93BC(3), does not remain on the land for longer than is reasonably necessary, having regard to the purpose of the entry (new section 93BF). Further, new section 93BC(2) prohibits entry onto land contrary to the conditions of the authorisation, or entry into residential premises or buildings.

Moreover, the new statutory powers of entry are subject to strict written notice requirements: the entity that owns or occupies the land must be provided with at least 30 business days' and 48 hours' notice of the entry in accordance with the permitted methods specified in new section 93BRA (new s 93BD), and immediately upon entering the land, the authorised officer must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the apparent owner or occupier of that land is given a copy of the notice (new s 93BLA(1)(b)–(2)).

Applications for entry orders are subject to the independent supervision and determination of the Magistrates' Court based on rules of evidence, which may make an order subject to any conditions it considers appropriate (new s 93BJ(3)), such as specifying time and duration restrictions when entry is permitted (new s 93BJ(2)(f) and 93BJ(3)).

Further safeguards also apply to entry under the authority of an entry order, such as the requirements (with limited exceptions) that the authorised officer make all reasonable efforts to serve a notice of an entry order application in accordance with section 93BH, and if granted, a copy of the order on the owner or occupier of the land, as soon as practicable after applying for an entry order (s 93BHA(1)) or the entry order is made (new s 93BK(1)), and if attempted service is unsuccessful, the authorised officer must cause a copy of the application and entry order to be affixed to, or in a conspicuous place near, an entrance to the land (new ss 93BHA(4) and 93BK(3)). New sections 93BHB and 93BHC further provide that an owner or occupier may object to an entry order application and the Magistrates' Court may extend or abridge the time within which an objection may be made. An authorised officer must also take all reasonable steps to ensure that the apparent owner or occupier of that land is given a copy of the notice immediately upon entering the land (new s 93BLA(1)(b)–(2)). If an entry order is granted, the order must not permit entry earlier than 7 days from the order date (new s 93BJ(3)(b)). The Magistrates' Court may hear and determine an application even if a person who objects does not appear at the hearing of the application, if the court is satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to do so (new s 93BJ(7)).

Immediately on entering the land under the new statutory powers or an entry order, an authorised officer must take all reasonable steps to ensure entry is announced to the owner or occupier (new s 93BLA(2)). Authorised officers are also required to carry and produce for inspection an identification card on request (new s 93BN).

Given the various safeguards outlined above, I consider that the new entry powers are appropriately tailored to reflect the source of the authority to enter land, with the most significant powers (authorising the reasonable use of force to gain entry) being reserved to circumstances where a magistrate has granted an order.

While both tiers of entry powers occasion an interference with privacy, these powers are necessary to facilitate important objectives, being the need to access land to undertake Cultural Heritage Mapping investigations and critical environmental effects assessments, for the purposes of expeditiously developing electricity infrastructure and delivering transmission projects. Delivery of these transmission projects is crucial to enable Victoria to connect generators to the grid by 2030 in accordance with national renewable energy targets. Accordingly, these amendments facilitate an electricity corporation's right to access land under section 93 of that Act, over landowners and third parties who seek to hinder or obstruct access. Accordingly, the interference with a property owner or occupier's right to privacy has a legitimate purpose.

As such, any interference with a person's privacy or home occasioned by these amendments is authorised by legislation that is precise and appropriately circumscribed and proportionate to the legitimate aims sought by those provisions, such that they are lawful and not capable of being exercised arbitrarily. Further, the obligations imposed on authorised officers entering onto private land operate to minimise any interference on the property owner's rights, thus constituting the least restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the Bill's purpose. Although the powers involve some interference with the privacy of the residents and occupier(s) of the premises, I consider that the amendments compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Right to property

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. A deprivation of property will not be limited to situations of forced transfer or extinguishment of title or ownership but will extend to any substantial restriction on a person's exclusive possession, use or enjoyment of their property. The powers to enter land for the purpose of carrying out investigations, surveys and works on private land are likely to interfere with the property rights of persons who are by this activity deprived of the exclusive possession, use and enjoyment of their land.

However, the right to property will only be limited where a person is deprived of property 'other than in accordance with the law'. For a deprivation of property to be 'in accordance with the law', the law must be publicly accessible, clear and certain, and must not operate arbitrarily. In this instance, the interference will not be arbitrary, but governed by a clear and accessible process set out in the Bill and subject to reasonable conditions. For example, the powers are subject to strict notice requirements (new ss 93BD, 93BE and 93BK). Other limits and conditions apply to entry powers such as the requirement not to remain on the land for longer than is reasonably necessary, having regard to the purpose of the entry (section 93BF(2)), thus ensuring that the interference with a person's property is the least restrictive possible whilst also enabling the necessary functions to be carried out.

Additionally, when exercising works powers under section 93(1), the CEO VicGrid or their authorised representative must do as little damage as possible and must, if required, make full compensation to the owner of, and all parties with an interest in, the land for any damage sustained by them in consequence of the exercise of the powers (amended s 93(2) EI Act). The CEO VicGrid or their authorised representative will also be subject to safety duties in relation to works on or in the immediate vicinity of rail infrastructure or rolling stock and the obligation to notify owners or occupiers of land of that land (amended ss 93A and 93B EI Act). VicGrid, as an electricity corporation, will also need to comply with these requirements.

Further, in relation to powers of entry under new section 93BC, the extensive safeguards outlined above demonstrate that any deprivation of property that occurs as a result of the new provisions inserted by the Bill is not arbitrary and will be in accordance with the law. I therefore consider that these clauses are compatible with the right to property.

Fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter, explained above, is relevantly is also engaged in relation to the power of the Magistrates' Court to grant an entry order if satisfied on the evidence, that there are reasonable grounds for making the order (new s 93BJ(1)). I am satisfied that the fair hearing right is not limited. There are appropriate procedures and safeguards. Applications for entry orders are subject to the independent supervision and determination of the Magistrates' Court based on rules of evidence, which may make an order subject to any conditions it considers appropriate (new s 93BJ(3)). Owners or occupiers of the land must be notified of the application and may object to the application, which affords procedural fairness (new sections 93BHA and 93BHB). The court must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for making the order (new section 93BJ(1)). The Magistrate's Court decision is subject to any appeal or judicial review. Following the making of the order, there are requirements about maximum duration of the order, giving of notice and service, which affords further procedural fairness (new sections 93BJ(3), 93BJ(6) and 93BK). As such, I conclude that the fair hearing rights in section 24(1) of the Charter are not limited by the provisions referred to above.

Presumption of innocence and right against self-incrimination – 'reasonable excuse' offence provisions

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

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

The Bill introduces offence provisions that contain 'reverse onus' elements:

- Obscure, damage or destroy a copy of an application affixed (section 93BHA and 93BK)
- Authorised officer may direct person to identify themselves including if the officer suspects on reasonable grounds that the name or address or evidence of ownership or occupation of the land is false (section 93BO)
- Authorised activities must not be hindered, obstructed or delayed (section 93BM).

These provisions support the enforcement of entry powers in the Bill in a necessary, reasonable and proportionate way. By creating 'reasonable excuse' exceptions, these offences in the Bill place an evidential burden on the accused, in that it requires the accused to raise evidence as to a reasonable excuse. However, in doing so, this offence does not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the essential elements of the offence.

The provisions in the Bill support the integrity of the entry powers or orders enforcement process including notification, identification of persons who may be subject of an entry power or order for the legitimate purpose of supporting the exercise of powers and functions under section 93 of the EI Act to undertake works (e.g., make surveys, construct any works, or place any structure or equipment). To permit the obstruction, hindrance, and false information or the refusal to co-operate with lawful requests of the authorised officer enforcing a power or court order, and to allow a person to escape sanction for doing so, would fundamentally undermine the enforcement of the scheme.

I do not consider that an evidential onus such as this limits the right to be presumed innocent, and courts in other jurisdictions have taken this approach. For these reasons, I consider the Bill is compatible with section 25(1) and section 25(2)(k) of the Charter. To the extent that any limitation is imposed on the right in section 25(2)(k), any such limitation is reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter for the reasons above.

Hon Ingrid Stitt MP
Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Ageing
Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Second reading

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability)
 (14:05): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

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

The Victorian Government is committed to managing the transition of the energy sector to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045 while ensuring the reliable supply of energy to Victorian consumers. Achievement of this goal, however, requires significant investment in the transmission network to connect and transport that new generation to Victorians.

This Bill amends the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005*, the *National Electricity (Victoria) Law*, the *National Electricity (Victoria) Regulations*, the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the *Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993*.

VicGrid, has been established as a State body under the *State Owned Enterprises Act 1992* and will transition to a State Business Corporation.

The Bill provides for the following:

Declared Network Functions Transferred

The transfer of functions and powers of the CEO VicGrid under the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* to the statutory body corporate, VicGrid.

The modification of the *National Electricity (Victoria) Law* and the *National Electricity (Victoria) Regulations*, as they apply as laws of Victoria, and the *National Electricity Rules* as they have the force of law in Victoria, so that the statutory body corporate VicGrid is conferred the declared network functions for Victoria under that Law, those Regulations and Rules.

To transfer certain functions of the Australian Energy Market Operator under Order in Council to the statutory body corporate VicGrid.

Access Regime

The establishment of new physical access arrangements in the State through the issue of a Renewable Energy Zone scheme authorities and grid impact authorities by the statutory body corporate VicGrid, to control access to the declared shared network and minimise constraints on generating systems and integrated resource systems within a renewable energy zone.

Community benefits

The establishment of a framework for the funding and payment of benefits to landholders, local communities and Traditional Owners impacted by new transmission, renewable generation and battery storage infrastructure.

Other amendments

To transfer certain property, rights and liabilities from the State relating to the CEO VicGrid, the Australian Market Energy Operator and its subsidiary, Transmission Company Victoria Pty Ltd, to the statutory body corporate VicGrid.

The Bill also amends the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the *Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993* to provide for:

Enforcement of access to land

An exemption for the statutory body corporate VicGrid from the requirement to hold a licence to transmit under the *Electricity Industry Act 2000*.

Establishment of a new power for authorised officers to enter land to facilitate works by an electricity corporation, including a power to service infringement notices.

The acquisition of easements in gross by electricity corporations.

I commend the Bill to the house.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): I move:

That debate be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is a bill that seeks to make a series of changes to superannuation in this state. It provides for a 90 per cent superable salary policy for executive officers and other contract employees who are contributors to the ESS scheme. It increases the number of times contributors to the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme can change their contribution rate each year. There is an increase in the period of time in which a spouse, following the death of a contributor, may apply to become a member. It reduces the size of the board from 12 to 10. It abolishes the requirement for State Superannuation Fund (SSF) members to be elected to sit on the ESSS board and requires board representatives of the State Superannuation Fund members to be nominated by unions rather than elected by members of the State Superannuation Fund. It abolishes the position of deputy member of the Emergency Services Superannuation Board.

I will be quite clear here that we are not going to oppose this bill. There are a number of changes that we think are reasonable, and there are a number of changes that we think are unexceptionable. But we do oppose this concept that it should be unions appointing people to the board rather than an election approach. We are not quite sure why the government thinks it is more democratic to do that, and we think that there is every reason to believe that the government has misunderstood what those members of the ESSS board would seek. There are amendments that we will circulate – and it might be appropriate to circulate those amendments now – that seek to maintain the arrangements in place, which would see an election of people to the board rather than the pure nomination of people to the board by a union. We think that this is a more democratic approach.

There has been, I should say, by my colleague the Shadow Minister for Finance Bridget Vallence, considerable consultation with stakeholders, super members, council associations, the Police Association Victoria, the Australian Education Union, the Victorian Ambulance Union, the Rail, Tram

and Bus Union and the Community and Public Sector Union. There were no great reservations about the bill, but we do believe that this is bad in principle. We do not believe the government has made a case as to why SSF members should no longer be directly elected as members. While the pool of candidates may be declining, there remain more than 6000 members who could potentially perform these roles, so there is a big pool to both vote and draw from. We should not be, in our view, disenfranchising members from their ability to vote for members, especially in circumstances where there has been no consultation with them about these changes.

In true form, this government goes about its business and makes a decision. It may have consulted narrowly, but it has not consulted widely. In these circumstances, we believe there is no reason to move from a directly elected model to one where declared unions are able to appoint their preferred candidates. The ability to directly elect members to the board should be, in our view, jealously guarded and provides the best method of ensuring that the interests of the fund members are respected and indeed protected.

There are a number of points I want to make here. Obviously, the bill makes several changes. The bill deals with the ESS scheme, which was originally established for the purpose of providing super benefits for emergency services employees. As a consequence of amendments made in 2005, the State Superannuation Fund, which had been in operation since 1925, was closed and all its assets and liabilities were transferred to the ESSS. The SSF had contributing members from the Victorian public service, the teaching service and other participating agencies.

In addition, as a result of various other legislative amendments over the preceding decades, the ESSS is now responsible for administering a number of other public sector superannuation schemes, including the transport scheme, the Metropolitan Transit Authority scheme, the Melbourne Water Corporation scheme, the Port of Melbourne Authority scheme and indeed the parliamentary contributory superannuation scheme. ESSS currently has around 124,500 members and holds over \$37 billion in defined benefit and accumulation net assets. Members typically work – or indeed worked – for Victoria Police, Fire Rescue Victoria, Ambulance Victoria and Victorian government schools. Members who commenced employment before 1994 may also have worked for Metro Trains, Yarra Trams, Corrections Victoria – I might add they would not have had those names at that time – Parks Victoria, court services and indeed V/Line.

This bill makes a number of changes in relation to how members can manage their superannuation contributions and, as I have already discussed, the composition of the Emergency Services Superannuation Board. The bill is not the result of an independent review or community consultation. Rather, it appears that the amendments contained in the bill are the result of internal discussion between the government and the board. We do not think this is a satisfactory way to go. The only people counted out of this discussion are the members of the fund, and we think that is not satisfactory.

There are changes to definitions of ‘salary’, there is a reduction in the size of the board. I mean, these sorts of board changes – what is actually going on here? Why are they so hell-bent on changing the board numbers? Currently there are 12 that are appointed by the Governor in Council. A board member is appointed for up to five years. The composition of the board is selected as follows: six members are nominated by the minister, six are directly elected by members of the scheme. Of the six, one is elected by Victoria Police members, one by Fire Rescue Victoria, one by Ambulance Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action members and three are elected by members of the SSF.

The government claims the current arrangement is consistent with Commonwealth superannuation legislation, which generally requires equal representation for employees and employers on superannuation trustee boards. However, as was noted in a recent Senate report, there has been a shift to superannuation boards consisting of more independent members to improve governance. A representative of a trade union is not considered to be an independent member. People can go and read the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993 if they wish to follow that up.

Since the SSF is closed to new members, the number of active members has declined. Active SSF members now represent around 11 per cent of the total membership. The government argues that because only active SSF members can vote and be elected to the board it is difficult to source SSF members from the declining available pool. Of the three SSF board members, there are currently two members sitting on the board who both have education and teaching type backgrounds. The government has also argued the size of the board is larger than what is considered optimal. There is all of this board theory that goes around in circles about the ideal size of boards; it moves with fashion. Let us be clear: reducing it from 12 to 10 is hardly a revolutionary change, but why on earth are they so bothered by it? It reduces the SSF member elected positions and government-nominated positions by one each. The new breakdown of the board will be five members nominated by the minister and so forth. The change in composition would ensure that equal representation of employee and employer members of the board is retained. The amendment does not appear in one sense controversial – just the size. It is the removing of the democratically elected arrangements, but again, this is a distinction without a difference in the size of the board, and you have got to ask why the government is so hell-bent on this.

We have been through the numbers that are active members of the SSF, and I am just completely unpersuaded by the government's proposal to have these appointed rather than elected. Why would you move to a less democratic model? The abolition of deputy members of the board – again, this is all strange attention to microdetail by the government, I believe, and there you are. They have pushed for this. It was earlier noted that the most concerning aspect of the bill is the proposed removal of democratically elected representatives. Although it may not directly infringe the charter of human rights, it is hardly consistent with the most democratic approach that could be adopted, so we are moving from a more democratic to a less democratic approach.

Sheena Watt: On a point of order, President – sorry to interrupt your remarks, Mr Davis – I am just having some trouble hearing Mr Davis, knowing that there is some trouble with the microphones. Is it possible that we could perhaps do a quick check on the microphone such that we might be able to hear Mr Davis clearly for the remainder of his remarks? It seems to me that he has moved it. It could be a little bit clearer for the benefit of the chamber.

David DAVIS: That is the essence of my contribution. We will not oppose this bill. We will seek to amend it and maintain a democratic election process as opposed to an appointment process.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:19): I rise to speak on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which is currently before the chamber. Superannuation is one of the most important parts of Australia's current economic system. It is what gives the workers of today the security of self-determination and what they will need in retirement. Bills like this one are especially important because they go directly to the superannuation of some of those Victorians who work in incredibly important fields. Particularly when we are writing legislation about workers in emergency services – people who work in some of the most difficult and dangerous jobs there are – it is important that we get it right and that we always look out for the interests of workers as individuals.

Before getting into the details of this bill, as I often do, I want to quickly remark on the work of the Transport Workers' Union in superannuation. It was the honour of my life to be the secretary of the Transport Workers' Union Victoria/Tasmania branch as well as the national president, and I am looking forward to next year, when I will become a 40-year member of my union – a union whose card I still wear every day in this place and a place that gave me and many others so much. Today let us remember and pay tribute to the fact that the union movement built, created and continues to support superannuation in this country. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Federated Storemen and Packers' Union of Australia and so many others led the charge towards superannuation. And the Transport Workers' Union was right there, with TWU Super being one of the first super funds established in Australia. In March this year, TWU Super merged with Mine Super to become Team Super, the top fund for workers in the transport, energy and mining sector, those workers who build and keep Australia running. It was a privilege to sit on the board of directors of TWU Super, along with my good friend

Senator Tony Sheldon from New South Wales, as well as Michael Kaine, Richard Olsen and Tim Dawson. It gave me a great opportunity to look out for workers' collective interests in the long run.

When I started my career as a jackaroo and then later as a baggage handler, I never expected that it would lead me to sitting on the board of a big super fund. But that is the power of super, giving workers a voice in their future and a dignified retirement. I am confident Richard, Tim and Michael from the TWU, who serve as member directors on the board, will continue in that great spirit of representing transport and now energy and mining sector workers at Team Super. We are so lucky to live in a country that has a system of industrial relations that delivers for workers in both of those ways and to have a union movement that has won us that system.

Of course we all know that at the foundation of the superannuation system the Liberal Party at the time made the mistake of opposing its introduction. Liberal prime ministers and federal treasurers have sought to delay increases to super rates over the years. Today, happily, even many of my colleagues on the other side of the chamber acknowledge that universal superannuation is an important right that gives workers security in retirement and that workers and their families want to keep it that way. So it is good to see that those opposite have been willing to support some of the changes that we are proposing with this bill. All of us on this side of the chamber – and hopefully many of those on the other side of the chamber – hope that super will still be around for decades and decades to come. The true success of the system will be managed not just by the security in retirement of our generation but by the security in retirement that it can provide for succeeding generations.

This bill we are discussing today is an amendment to several existing pieces of legislation. It relates to existing superannuation rates for certain public sector employees, changes which need to be made to adjust for the changing nature of the public sector and to give greater choice and better service to members of the relevant super funds. The bill relates to the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme, a super fund which serves emergency response workers such as firefighters, police and paramedics. ESSS also covers a number of non-emergency service public sector workers who were members of the State Superannuation Fund prior to 2005, when it was absorbed by ESSS. The changes which have been made to this bill will help support the members of this super fund, whatever their job is. The first change being made to the existing legislation is the implementation and standardisation of 90 per cent superable salary for executive officers and contract employees in law. The decision to place the superable salary of these workers at 90 per cent was made in 2022, and it was initially implemented outside of the legislation. Today we are making this change to put it into law and to ensure that it is applied consistently and fairly to all relevant workers.

Another change made in this bill is the removal of the limit on how many times a member can change their contribution rate each year. That limit is currently once every year. This places an unnecessary constraint on workers' ability to manage their own finances how they see fit. With the financial technology that the ESSS uses today, the government has judged that any additional administrative burden this change might create would be next to negligible. We believe that giving workers more choices, more autonomy and more control over their financial life is a good thing, and it fits very well with the spirit of what superannuation has always been about. In fairness, this is not a world-changing reform, but to understand why it matters, one only has to imagine the frustration of people having to wait months, up to a year, to make a simple change to how they want to contribute to their super.

Another change designed to support families is that we are extending the period that a spouse of a member who has passed away has to apply to join an ESSSuper accumulation arrangement. This is important because the loss of a spouse is a difficult time for anybody and for some people three months might just be not enough time to manage the process of grieving, alongside the living and financial adjustments that come with it. That is why the three-month time limit is being changed to be a one-year time limit, ensuring fairness, sensitivity, respect and adequate time for family members to update and change their financial arrangements.

We are also making changes to the governance structures of the fund, reducing the size of the board from 12 to 10. Currently half the members are appointed by the minister and half are elected by the members of the fund. Three board members are elected by the emergency services members, with one being elected by members from the three emergency services: Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and Fire Rescue Victoria. The remaining three positions are elected by members of the old State Superannuation Fund. Since SSF stopped taking in new members 20 years ago this year, that has meant its membership has declined significantly, with only 11 per cent of its members being considered active members still making contributions. This means only 11 per cent of SSF members are eligible to vote in board of directors elections.

With so many active members, one issue in recent years has been the recruitment of candidates to sit on the board. The changes in this bill remove the requirement of the candidates to have been SSF members so that it can open the field up to a much wider range of candidates who do not have to have been SSF members since 2005. If nothing were to change, the pool of people eligible to stand in these elections would continue to shrink, leaving non-active members of the fund without proper representation on the board. This will also change the rules to the SSF appointees, with those directly nominated by unions that cover SSF members. This nomination process will be determined following a consultation process between the minister and the relevant trade unions, because the conditions of membership are different for each of the emergency workers who are members of ESSS than the former SSF members and there will be no change to the elections of the ESSS members to the board. Importantly, this change will maintain the very important 50–50 representations of employers and employees on the board of directors, ensuring the board is able to balance the various interests of the government and those of the public sector workers. I will leave my remarks at that.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:27): I am pleased to make some brief comments on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and in doing so acknowledge that, as my lead speaker Mr Davis mentioned, the Nationals, along with the Liberals, will not be opposing this bill, which is overwhelmingly perfunctory and unexciting in a sense, except for a couple of clauses in relation to board appointments. Our amendments will wind those back if accepted by the house.

It is an interesting one, because growing up on a farm, the idea of superannuation in a small dairy community did not exist. It is only in becoming a teacher and then a member of Parliament that you actually understand that people have this very important, I will say, tool or safety net about safety within retirement and retirement security. In doing so I just want to put on record my interest in our education system and about improving financial literacy across schools and throughout our secondary schools, because anywhere our young people look, and they may well end up in the essential emergency services as employees of the state, those particular people, in a variety of occupations, whether it be Fire Rescue Victoria, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, Parks Victoria, Yarra Trams, Corrections Victoria or V/Line – the list goes on – may end up contributing to society and to our state in those workplaces, and all hail to them if they do. But on that pathway there, I think it is really important that the government renew a focus and put the eyes on the education system around teaching financial literacy, because in our society, as I was saying, there is so much opportunity to spend money. If you doomscroll on any device on social media, there are a plethora of ways in which to spend your money, and it is a cash-driven and acquiring society where spending seems to be the trend rather than saving. I think teaching the importance about financial literacy in young Victorians is worthwhile.

A friend of mine who retired only recently worked in the government sector – he worked for the ATO, but we will not hold that against him. His whole motivation now in life is about educating young people to save, to put down their retirement security and to spend – to live life and enjoy life – but save. I think that is a really important one. It is also important for those young people to reduce debt and reduce financial stress; we know in our cost-of-living crisis at the moment the importance of doing that. So I put that on record for the government to acknowledge and double down on their efforts within our education system and TAFE sector.

Also in terms of superannuation, the other side of our population, the Victorians who are self-employed or who are sole traders, farmers, small business owners and the like, are often focused on paying down debts, paying off their asset, paying off their shop, paying off their machinery or paying off their farm. Their thoughts about that nest egg into the future are far, far away. Again, it can be quite a struggle. I note that in 1992 there came the superannuation guarantee: if you were a small business owner and you employed someone, it was introduced at that time that you actually had to provide super for your employees. I think, again, it was a very worthwhile scheme, and I think it was actually introduced by the Keating government and endorsed by all.

Just on that and on the importance of saving for a nest egg, superannuation in Victoria started off back in 1925. It was established under the State Superannuation Fund for public servants. Moving along to 1986, the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme was created for our police, firefighters and ambulance workers et cetera and that relates to the bill we are discussing today. In 2005 the SSF was closed to new members and its assets were transferred – the responsibility was transferred – to the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme. Indeed that scheme serves over 124,000 members and holds more than \$37 billion in assets. Certainly we hope it is well held in the context of this government.

In relation to the bill specifically, some of the concerns that we have are around the lack of democracy in terms of the State Superannuation Fund members. We want to see that removed from this bill to ensure that there is a democratically elected board rather than it being appointed by the declared unions. We have heard Mr Davis go into that in a fairly deep dive. What I am quite concerned about is, again, the direct erosion of that democratic process within this bill. It certainly goes against what the government is on the one hand saying in relation to the valued lived experience of board members by taking away the opportunity of those SSF members in regard to their voting rights. With that, in relation to the total number of members, I have said that the active pool of those SSF members is over 6000. So for the government to say that it is hard to access members for the board I find quite absurd. Also, changing the composition of the board from 12 down to 10: what is the rationale behind that? It does not seem sound. I note, from many conversations I have had with different sorts of boards over time that it is often good to have an odd number – 11 or nine – yet this government has chosen to reduce it to 10.

In summation, we are not opposing the bill. We acknowledge the strength and the importance of this sector. I know from my experience I would like to put on record my great thanks, particularly as I sit underneath an incident control centre, and there are some wonderful, wonderful people up there. Some of them are about to retire and use some of that wonderful security that they have. It is important for them to be protected. This bill is largely unexciting and we are not opposing the bill, but we certainly want to see a greater level of democracy retained and we will be moving those amendments to clause 4.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:36): I am pleased to speak on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 will strengthen the administration and governance of elements of Victoria's public sector superannuation scheme. The bill will amend the Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986 to do a number of things. It will legislate the superable salary policy for executive officers and other contract employees who are members of the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme, the ESSS. It will increase the number of times a member can change their contribution rate per year. At the moment you can only change it once a year, and of course circumstances can change in less than a year and sometimes an effective and responsible response to that is to make changes sooner than in a 12-month period.

The bill also allows spouses, following the death of a member, a period of 12 months in which to apply to become a member of the scheme. It is currently three months. Of course anybody who has experienced a death in their family, which I have, will know that not only are those first three months a very poignant and excruciating grieving period; it is also a period that includes a lot of death administration, I suppose. You are waiting for the death certificate to arrive and you are looking at wills and estates and so on and sorting out all of that stuff, all the while grieving, and it is quite possible

that something like membership of a super scheme may well be missed. So it is a very thoughtful change to make to allow a partner of someone who has died 12 months in which to apply to become a member of that scheme.

The bill reduces the size of the board from 12 to 10. As someone that has sat on many boards over a couple of decades, my experience is that too many cooks spoil the broth. It is more important to have a qualified, experienced and effective board than it is to have a very large board – quality over quantity. That is a very positive change. It removes the requirement for the State Superannuation Fund representatives on the board of the SSF members and varies their selection process such that they are nominated by unions rather than being elected by members. There is a very practical reason for this, and that is that this scheme is currently closed, so the pool of potential directors obviously is declining all the time.

The bill also abolishes the position of deputy board member, which I had never heard of before and is clearly an aberration. I understand it has only been used a couple of times. Really, if you are on a board, you should fulfil your responsibilities, you should know what your quorum is and you should be able to make sure that you can make the decisions that you are able to make in a timely manner without bringing people who are not even board directors in to replace you temporarily. So that is another really good change.

I am not intending to cover off a detailed analysis of this bill. It is a very sensible and very logical one that brings things into line so that all Victorians are reasonably getting access to good and effective superannuation rules. As this bill is debated today, I would like to just note that Labor has always protected and strengthened superannuation because every worker deserves a dignified retirement. Superannuation is one of the most important pillars of financial security in retirement. It allows people to build savings throughout their working lives so that they can enjoy a comfortable and dignified retirement without relying solely on the age pension. By contributing regularly to super, workers benefit from long-term investment growth, the power of compounding returns and concessional tax treatment.

I would further like to say that it was Paul Keating that initiated superannuation in this country. He always said that 12 per cent was the ideal figure, and it turns out that is roughly correct, for retirement. I must say that my children's generation, millennials, are going to be the first generation of Australians who will really not need to question whether they are going to have a nest egg. Provided that they work most of their life, they will have an absolutely fantastic nest egg available to them when they retire. Certainly when I started my career, superannuation was 3.5 per cent. In my super fund my super balance does not look as good as what my kids' is going to look like when they are my age.

The other thing that superannuation does, just before I close, is strengthen the economy – not just the economy for the country but also the balance sheet for government. When you have got the majority of Australians secure in retirement, there is less demand on the age pension and other services. So in retirement people will be able to afford the things that they need but also hopefully the things that they would like to enjoy as well. It is no wonder that Australia's super scheme is the envy of many other governments around the world. It actually showcases how long-term strategic thinking and planning and implementation of good government policy can be incredibly powerful for all Australians. Today's bill is a small contribution to refining that arrangement. I commend the bill to the house.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:43): I too stand to support the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and echo the comments of my colleague Ms Ermacora. Of course it is a Labor Party bringing reform and progressing the status of superannuation in this state, as indeed we have done around the nation, because the Labor Party is committed to ensuring the quality of life for Victorians and Australians. Superannuation is so important in that, ensuring that we have a dignified retirement for working people.

We know that the Liberal–Nationals, all the way, have kicked and screamed to try and work against superannuation, indeed as they do with so many things that make the lives of working Victorians

better. But superannuation, as Ms Ermacora pointed out, has ensured that as it has been rolled out, deployed and progressed over the years, that entire generation of workers and generations going forward are going to be able to retire in dignity. They are going to be able to retire with financial security. Unfortunately, we have seen that particularly a whole lot of women who have not been participants in a workforce as superannuation has been brought in have not retired with the superannuation that current and future generations will retire with. I think that particularly we on the Labor Party side are incredibly proud of providing that equal support for all working people, no matter their gender or education level, and ensuring that everybody has that opportunity.

This legislation is about really good, commonsense changes, particularly the point around extending the period spouses have to apply to become a member of ESSSuper's accumulation scheme after the death of their spouse, ensuring that the appropriate timeframe is there for that option to be taken up, particularly when people are in an incredibly difficult period of their life. We do not want a 90-day window, which is a blink of an eye in that situation, to be there, so it is 12 months, alongside a number of other really important changes that Ms Ermacora and other colleagues of mine have spoken to.

Superannuation, to me, when we talk about the things that improve the quality of people's lives, whether it is housing, education, health, transport, being in a sustainable environment, is something I think we can point to as a major reform in the last couple of generations that has significantly improved the quality of our lives, not just individually but collectively as a nation. The funds that are held through our superannuation funds are something we should all be proud of. The Liberals and Nationals are probably fundamentally opposed to working people having their funds in capital markets; I think they would prefer not to see that. Indeed we have seen them attack it numerous times, whether it is through COVID, whether it is through house prices – they would rather see house prices pushed up by people being pushed to raid their superannuation funds. We know the impact year on year and what happens when you take money out of your super and what that means one, two, three decades later to that superannuation total.

I am very proud as a member of the Labor Party of everything that has been done on superannuation, and I am always proud to support any reform that makes it operate better and more fairly for workers who need to use superannuation. This legislation not only does that, but it will enshrine the 90 per cent superable salary policy for executive officers and other contract employees. This provision codifies the existing policy and will mean there is consistent application across all emergency services employers. It will reduce the size of the Emergency Services Superannuation Board from 12 to 10 members, and the amendment will bring ESSSuper's board in line with other Victorian government boards. It is best practice from a government perspective to have smaller boards, but we are ensuring that we achieve this whilst maintaining equal employer and employee representation. In practice it will mean that government employer representation will reduce to five, emergency services employee reps will retain three and State Super Fund representation will reduce to two. This is reflective of the SSF being a closed fund with a reducing active membership. It will also remove the requirement for State Superannuation Fund representatives on the board to be active SSF members and allow the unions that represent SSF members to nominate candidates to the board. The bill will provide for the minister to determine a nomination process to allow relevant unions to nominate suitable candidates for the SFF board positions, and the process will be co-designed in consultation with unions that represent the SFF membership and will be made public through gazettal.

As a number of my colleagues have made contributions on the importance and the value of this bill, I have got no doubt that other members will be looking to do so, and I will leave my contribution there.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:49): I also rise to speak on an important bill today. I will share a few words, because I know Ms Watt is also anxious to have her say on this bill and indeed the minister is keen to do some summing-up remarks as well.

This is a very important bill today, the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is important because it improves the administration and governance of the state's public sector

superannuation scheme, as Mr McIntosh referred to, the ESSSuper. It is going to ensure that the scheme will be able to provide its members with the services that they expect and rightly deserve as part of any modern superannuation fund scheme. Indeed it is a very important system that we have in this country. Though it is fraying into the federal space a bit, the superannuation system plays a hugely important role in providing secure retirement savings for working Australians and indeed in keeping trade, resourcing and investment onshore as well and enabling us to grow our national wealth, and to do so in a way that is in the pockets not of the rich and privileged few but in the pockets of everyday working Australians. That is why superannuation is so important and why we must do everything that we can do to reform this scheme and make it more fit for purpose and more modern for those public servants, who do work hard for the people of Victoria, so that they can get the most value from it. I will yield my time there, and I look forward to continued debate on this bill.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:50): Such is the enthusiasm of Labor members to get up and make contributions on super, I too would like to join my colleagues and talk in fierce defence of superannuation, one of the most iconic legacies of the Keating years. I am always proud to be part of a party that looks after workers and serves working people every day, and I intend to help us continue to build on the proud Labor legacy of superannuation with this bill that will strengthen the governance, efficiency and fairness of our state's public sector superannuation schemes while protecting the dignity and security of retirement for the people who have contributed so much to our community.

Before I keep going with the limited contribution I am going to make I want to take the time to acknowledge the extraordinary service of our emergency services personnel – to shed light on our firefighters and paramedics – and our other dedicated public service sector workers, not to mention the teachers, the public transport staff and many others whose work sustains Victorians every single day. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, I have seen firsthand – very recently in fact, about 48 hours ago – the sacrifices these workers have made with their loved ones and what they make and contribute to our state physically, emotionally and of course also financially. They are some of the biggest and most generous donors and philanthropists anywhere in our state, those that work in emergency services, so I thank them for all that they do. Emergency services personnel endure these sufferings to help serve the people of Victoria. I have just got to say this bill is about making sure that the superannuation scheme they rely on for the dignity of their retirement is fit for purpose now and into the future.

ESSSuper, Emergency Services & State Super, is something so many of our frontline workers can rely on and a reason why they can enjoy their retirement after years of hard work and dedicated service to Victorians. This bill allows for more control for members and their families, gives more agency to those who need it, allows members to adjust their contribution rate more often and brings ESSS in line with other funds. Another big change that this bill before us creates is enabling union-representing members to nominate candidates for positions on the State Superannuation Fund board, and of course there will also be a nomination process that will allow these unions to put forward suitable candidates under the bill – a process that has been co-designed in consultation with the unions representing SSF members to ensure it reflects their needs and their perspective.

We know that change is afoot with the SSF and that the demographics are indeed changing. Previous contributors to this have spoken about the average age of active members and how so many are approaching retirement. As a result the pool of active members willing and able to commit to the five-year appointment is steadily diminishing, and I am pleased to see that this bill before us will allow unions to nominate candidates. The amendment will futureproof SSF member representation and ensure that those that serve on the board reflect the interests of their membership. This is especially important for members working in the Victorian public sector, public transport and teaching services – those who rely on the unions to represent them and safeguard their long-term superannuation interests.

I was actually most pleased to see a couple of changes in this bill: firstly, the extension of the amount of time a spouse has to apply to become a member of the ESSS accumulation scheme in the case that

their partner has passed away from a period of three months to 12 months. Those first 12 weeks after your partner passes are absolutely devastating, there is no doubt about it. So to allow for the extension to 12 months so that loved ones can take the time necessary to heal and grieve without having to worry about the enormous amount of forms that a super fund will put in front of them is a welcome, welcome change. I am also happy to see that this is in fact a very fair and compassionate decision.

There is a lot in this bill that I could talk to. I am very, very much in support of it. I am mostly in support of the members and all that they do supporting the good people of our state in the times when they need it most, because regardless of market fluctuations or what is going on all around the world, working people deserve the dignity of a retirement they can trust and to have more agency and control over their own contributions. So the changes that were detailed by Mr Berger earlier, which will allow for members to change what their investments are to be much more in keeping with current modern practice, I think are ones that are very much welcome.

I know that there are some amendments that were put forward earlier, and I look forward to getting to the contributions in the committee on that. I will leave my remarks there but just say to all that take on the enormous responsibility of being stewards of working people's retirement: thank you for what you do. I am hoping that the bill before us makes that role even more fit for purpose for a modern-day super fund serving the needs of those who put themselves in harm's way each and every day to protect Victorians.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (14:57): I just have a few remarks on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 in summing up. This is a bill that contains reforms that are sensible and balanced. It is about improving the operation of the scheme for the benefit of the members – improvements like giving members the right to change their contribution rates when they need to and also for widows to have the right to a longer period of time to elect to become a member of the scheme.

It is also about supporting better governance and ensuring that the State Superannuation Fund members can continue to be represented on the board. Our reforms are welcomed by members and by the relevant representative unions. They know that an ageing and declining active membership means that we have to act now or we risk the reality of there being a lack of representation of members on the SSF board. It is important to maintain the principle of equal representation of employees and employers on the board – I think that is something that is not in dispute. The government's reforms mean that the unions that represent teachers, the Victorian public service and public transport workers – those unions that know the interests of their members best – will be able to nominate a suitable candidate to be considered for appointment by the Governor in Council. Candidates would of course still need to be vetted and ensure that they have the requisite skills and experience to contribute. Ultimately, as I said, it is a gig appointment. We believe that this process is a sensible solution that futureproofs the governance arrangements for the SSF directors and should be supported by all members in this place. I think we have got an amendment that argues otherwise and on that we will go into committee, is my understanding.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

*Committee***Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.****Clause 4 (15:00)**

David DAVIS: I move:

1. Clause 4, page 4, lines 2 and 3, omit “persons nominated by declared unions” and insert “members of the Scheme elected by members of the Scheme”.
2. Clause 4, page 4, lines 7 to 29 and page 5, lines 1 to 8, omit all words and expressions on those lines.

I explained in the second-reading debate the purpose of our amendments. Our amendments are to seek to maintain the arrangements whereby members of the board would be elected. We think it is more democratic. We think that the government’s proposal here moves to a less democratic provision, and as I am informed, the first two amendments are in fact a relevant test for the remaining amendments.

Jaclyn SYMES: At the outset, Mr Davis, of course the government supports the principles of democracy, but the amendments that we are proposing do not bring about a lack of democracy, because that would imply that there is currently an effective democratic process and that is not what is happening. The reality is that there is the ability to directly elect members at the moment, but that is past its use-by date because it is not being exercised, and if we do not change that will mean that we will end up with a lack of board positions, as is the case at the moment. We have had one that has been vacant since 2022. If the process was working, I would not disagree with your position that maintaining elections has merit, but in practice that is not fit for purpose for what is currently happening with the State Superannuation Fund, and therefore it is disadvantaging their members because they do not have an appropriate pool of people to be considered to represent their interests on the board. There are only 6262 active members left in the SSF and estimated reductions of 17 per cent each year as members increasingly retire, so without the action the Parliament would have to make changes to legislation in any event, and we think it is appropriate now, given the advice we have had, particularly with the fact that I have pointed to that we have one vacancy. As I understand it, of the two appointees that are currently on the board, one was appointed in 2007 and one was appointed in 2010, and each time it has come up for renewal there has not been interest by people wanting to put their hand up to run against the candidates and they have therefore remained on the board. Again, I thank them for their work, but at some point they probably would like to get off and know that there is a replacement, and the current system does not facilitate that.

Allowing the unions which represent SSF members to nominate members of the board is considered an efficient and appropriate means for ensuring candidates represent the views of the whole membership – active, deferred and pensioner members – and it is also in line with what happens in other states. The Commonwealth and New South Wales also use umbrella union representative bodies. The ACTU and Unions NSW respectively are also given the ability to nominate employee representatives to the board.

In summary, we would not be able to support the opposition’s amendments because they would reverse the government’s proposed governance reforms, which are really all about ensuring that the board can operate effectively for the benefit of the members.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Just speaking on behalf of my colleagues and myself, democratic unions remain the best voice for Victorian workers and are best placed to represent their interests, even noting union membership in Australia has, sadly, fallen from the highs that we saw in previous decades. Therefore my Greens colleagues and I think it is perfectly reasonable that two board members be nominated by relevant unions who are representative of the make-up of members of the SSF. It is quite a fair balance considering, from what I understand, that five members will still be nominated by the minister, one from Victoria Police members, one from Ambulance Victoria members, one from Fire Rescue Victoria and one from Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action members. The Greens

support the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 as is, so therefore will not be supporting the Liberals amendments as proposed today.

David DAVIS: I just would say that we disagree with the government on this. We do not believe that it is impossible to find people to run for election. We think more could have been done to achieve that. But leaving that aside, I think we will just have to agree to disagree.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (13): Melina Bath, Gaele Broad, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (21): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Amendments negatived.

Clause 4 agreed to; clauses 5 to 16 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (15:19): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (15:19): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:20): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, government business, 3, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:20): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and in doing so indicate that the opposition is opposed to this bill. This bill substantially weakens accountability measures, particularly through reduced budget reporting in election years, warrant removals and expanded discretionary exemptions for declared bodies. Additionally, there is a series of provisions that have come back from the dead, from a lapsed 2017 bill, without any comprehensive contemporary review. This further undermines confidence in reasonable and robust legislative scrutiny.

I want to just lay out some of the provisions of the bill. It amends the Financial Management Act 1994, the Constitution Act 1975 and the Local Government Act 1989. It updates financial management principles, it says. It claims to embed budget overrun notification processes. It empowers ministerial discretion to include or exclude agencies from the Financial Management Act. We are troubled by that. It removes Governor-issued warrant requirements for accessing public funds. We are opposed to that. It clarifies, it says, the responsibilities of accountable officers, boards and chief financial officers. It removes reporting obligations of the budget updates and the September quarterly reports. It refines creation and cessation of agencies and ministerial direction-making powers.

In the 2024–25 budget papers the government announced it was undertaking a review of the Financial Management Act to ensure it remained fit for purpose. The government noted it had been 30 years since the Financial Management Act was introduced, and it was followed by the global economic downturn, the terrible outcome of the Cain–Kirner years, and it was a Kennett government act that was forward leaning. It was much more transparent than what had been there before. The Department of Treasury and Finance has advised the bill was the result of a review known in that period. It should be noted that a bill similar to this one was introduced in the 58th Parliament, the Financial Management and Constitution Acts Amendment Bill 2017; however, the 2017 bill lapsed before the 2018 election. There are a number of provisions of the 2017 bill which are mirrored in this new bill. It is therefore clear that a number of measures proposed in the bill are not a result of the most recent DTF review.

There are changes to definitions in clauses 3 and 4, updating a number of those definitions. The updated definitions have the same meanings as defined in section 4 of the Public Administration Act 2004. The amendment to ministerial direction seeks to clarify that a person or body given a direction must comply with the direction. The amendment seeks to give directions made by the minister stronger teeth and remove any ambiguity as to whether compliance with the direction is discretionary. There is the establishment or abolition of entities and warrants. This removes ministerial consultation for entity creation or abolition, adding administrative complexity. It removes warrant-based procedures, eliminating critical oversight previously provided by the Governor and the Auditor-General.

The budget discipline provisions we think are less satisfactory. It establishes a principle that each department or public body should operate within its budget, but we hold no belief that the government will adhere to that. It lacks an explicit enforcement mechanism or measure, and the term ‘should’ will make the insertion largely meaningless – it does not say ‘must’.

The election period financial reporting exemptions – we are troubled by some of this – insert a new section in the Financial Management Act that grants significant exemptions from critical financial reporting such as budget updates and quarterly reports during election periods, reducing government transparency. With the document transmission issues, it extends submission deadlines for financial

documents from 15 November to 15 December, diminishing timely parliamentary scrutiny. This we think is a problem, especially near an election period. It allows selective application of budget management provisions to public bodies via gazette notification, risking an arbitrary set of exemptions and reduced oversight.

There are accountability and reporting issues. The bill inserts a new section 41, which includes a number of new definitions. One of these new definitions is of a ‘declared body’, which is defined as a prescribed office or public body specified in an order made under section 41A of the Financial Management Act. New section 41A provides that:

The Governor in Council, by Order published in the Government Gazette, may declare a prescribed office or a public body to be a declared body ...

under part 7.

The financial management obligations in clause 16 insert new provisions which impose a number of responsibilities and requirements on departments, boards and other public bodies. The new requirements are referred to as overarching obligations. Section 43A imposes an obligation on the board of a prescribed office to ensure the accountable office fulfils its overarching obligations. The board is responsible to the Minister for Finance in fulfilling these obligations, with new section 43B imposing a new overarching obligation on the accountable officer of a department or public body to manage the following in a financially effective, economical, efficient and sustainable way:

the operations of the department or public body;

the public resources for which the department or public body is responsible.

In order to carry out its overarching obligation the accountable officer must establish and maintain effective controls and reporting mechanisms and ensure that the person who holds the position of chief finance officer can meet the responsibilities of that position under the Financial Management Act.

The accountable officer is required to report on compliance. New section 43A requires the chief financial officer of a department or public body to assist the accountable officer to fulfil and report on compliance with overarching obligations. New sections 43D and E specifically relate to declared bodies, with the new sections providing that a board or the accountable officer of a declared body will be required to comply with these overarching obligations. There is no requirement to report on compliance with the overarching obligation to DTF or the department head of portfolio. As such, there does not appear to be any mechanism for external oversight or scrutiny of these declared bodies in relation to their new financial reporting obligations. We think these are fatal flaws, fatal weaknesses. We are not at all convinced that this will help. We think it will make things worse. Already we have a lot of problems across this government, and they are getting worse, not better. We think that this is designed to weaken many of the provisions.

Clause 17 deals with disclosure of financial information. Section 44A is to be repealed and replaced by new provisions concerning accountable officers being required to provide financial information either on receipt of a request or by determining that a person or body should be made aware of the information. The following persons may request financial information: the relevant minister; the department head of DTF; in the case of a public body, the department head of the portfolio area; in the case of a public body or prescribed office, the board. Declared bodies are again excluded from this requirement, and it is not clear why that is. Under new section 44AB, a declared body will only be required to provide or disclose financial information to the head of DTF or the board, if any, of the declared body. We think there are a series of weaknesses here. I think I have made my point.

The budget overrun reporting – at clause 18 a new section 44C will be inserted, which will require departments or public bodies to provide written notification to the department head of DTF if the department or public body is likely to exceed its budget. If a notification is given, it must be accompanied by a plan of how the department or public body intends to manage risks associated with exceeding its budget or other identified issues. The bill does not provide any timeframe by which such

notification must be made after a department or public body identifies it is likely to exceed its budget. This new provision will not apply to a declared body. Why are these declared bodies all exempt?

Financial statement dispensation – a new section 52A will be inserted, which provides the Minister for Finance with the power to dispense with the requirement for a public body to prepare and submit a financial statement to the Auditor-General if the Auditor-General has dispensed with the requirement to audit the public body's financial statements for a particular year. The intention of this provision is to relieve small public bodies, mainly operated by volunteers, such as small cemetery trusts, from being required to incur significant costs in order to prepare financial statements that comply with the Auditor-General's requirements. I understand what is trying to be achieved here. I understand the logic of what the government is trying to do there. The example of cemetery trusts was used in the briefing, as I understand it. As a former Minister for Health I understand the problems of small cemetery trusts and went to a lot of effort to try and assist them. I also know that there are financial risks with smaller bodies of this type. We need to be very careful in having lesser control and oversight. It has got to be a very close balance. I am far from convinced that the government has struck the balance right on this.

Clauses 22 to 25 are around the removal of warrants and related matters. The amendments repeal warrants provisions, removing crucial oversight from the Governor, and correspondingly amend the Constitution Act 1975 and the Local Government Act 1989, weakening traditional accountability mechanisms. For those who maybe do not understand about warrants, this is where a financial call is to be made. There needs to be a tick off by the Governor, and that enables better and stronger oversight by broader government, through the Governor, to ensure that there is a really clear and tight set of decisions about whether financial matters, through a warrant, are justified. It is not, in my view, simply an old bit of cobweb to be swept aside or a bit of an old practice. It was put there for a reason – to tighten and sharpen financial accountability. As with most of this bill, this is all about weakening financial accountability, leaving the state and Victoria more generally more exposed. It is about weakening all those checks and balances that have been built up over a long time.

I am, frankly, very concerned about this bill and where it heads. My colleague Mr Newbury, the Shadow Treasurer, did a comparison with the lapsed 2017 bill, and as he pointed out, this 2025 bill significantly mirrors the provisions of the lapsed Financial Management and Constitution Acts Amendment Bill 2017. It had the removal of warrants. It had the ministerial directions. It had the same sorts of provisions on financial management obligations, reporting and disclosure arrangements. There are some differences. The budget overrun notifications are new; the election period reporting is new. The bill significantly reduces mandatory financial disclosures during the election period compared to the narrower approach of the 2017 bill, and I think this is about reducing scrutiny for this government, a government in financial strife ahead of the state election next year.

The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill introduces some enhanced financial mechanisms, but these are far outweighed by the critical weakening of traditional accountability mechanisms and transparency. Reducing the election period reporting exemptions and removing the Governor-issued warrants, as I say, will reduce historical checks. This is a bad bill, a bill that strips away longstanding mechanisms that are understood and have built up over many years to provide a stronger set of controls on finances. Broad ministerial discretion to exempt declared bodies from financial oversight introduces considerable risk of inconsistent oversight and diminished transparency. This is not the time to introduce measures that weaken financial oversight and control. Victoria's deteriorating financial position is significant. We have got a terrible escalating debt, with projections of it reaching, for the general government sector, \$194 billion over the forward estimates. There is an increasingly fragile credit rating. The bill's erosion of financial governance safeguards is, in my view, concerning, and ultimately that is one of the reasons that the coalition will oppose this bill.

This is Labor through and through. It is a bill designed to weaken accountability, weaken oversight, weaken control. Labor wants to spend taxpayers money and it wants to do it with abandon. It wants to do it without proper checks and balances. It wants to do it in a way that the controls on taxpayers money are weakened and watered down to next to nothing. I am very concerned about where this will

head. Everything we have seen from this government over the last few years – I mean, we dealt with a motion in this chamber a little while ago that dealt with the Bracks government. Do you remember Steve Bracks? He introduced a debt ceiling of 6 per cent. That was stuck with by Brumby, Baillieu and Denis Napthine, and then after the change of government in 2014 it was stuck with initially by Andrews. But just before the 2018 election we had Andrews and Pallas go out and say, ‘We’re going to go to 12 per cent of GSP for debt.’ Well, they went off and away it rocketed. Even before COVID hit it was skyrocketing high, and now we are heading for 26, 27 or 28 per cent of gross state product. This is what you get with Labor governments, Labor governments that have no control over the projects, no control over the spending, Labor governments that squander and waste money on projects because they cannot control the projects. You look at them –

John Berger interjected.

David DAVIS: I tell you what, what we would not be doing is weakening control on these projects and letting things rip and letting them run out of control as taxpayers money is squandered and blundered. That is what they do. This is what Labor governments do. They always do this. They cannot help themselves. It is in their DNA. And I have got to say it is very clear that this government is a real risk for the Victorian community now, and this bill will make it worse. It will weaken the controls, weaken the checks, weaken the balances and weaken the control over taxpayers money. I think it is a bad bill. I think it is a bill that should be absolutely and implacably opposed.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: No, they are doing it to weaken control over taxpayers money so that this government can spend the money uncontrolled and they can do it without the normal checks and balances. This is what you get with Labor governments. They cannot be trusted with money. They blow up the money – they blow it up – and that is the shocking thing about the story of this government. Andrews and Pallas went out there in 2018 and ripped away all pretence of sticking with financial arrangements. They went, ‘We’re going to 12 per cent of GSP for debt.’ But actually it is way up in the 20s now, and it is going to go higher under the current projections. It is going to go to \$194 billion in debt for the general government sector – more if you count the outer sector. But all of it is because this government cannot control money, because they do not have control of these major projects. These projects are careering out of control, and it is taxpayers money. What this bill seeks to do is weaken those controls even further. It is a bad bill. It is a bill that the community should be concerned about. It is a bill that the community should be very, very worried about, and we will oppose it.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:40): The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 modernises and brings up to date the Financial Management Act 1994. Just reflecting on Mr Davis’s contribution, it really makes me think of the definition of ‘conservatism’. The definition of conservatism is ‘keep everything the same, do not change anything’, and when I go through what I have to say in my speech you will see the opposite to conservatism. This is all about ensuring the Financial Management Act 1994 reflects the realities of the 21st century. It is about strengthening transparency, accountability and clarity so that every department and every agency knows its responsibilities – not weakening, strengthening. It has been more than 20 years since the last major update to this act.

The bill makes a number of important changes. It updates the financial management principles so that every department and agency is expected by law to operate within its budget. What is wrong with that? It embeds an early warning system requiring departments and agencies to notify if there is a risk of overspending. This means intervention can happen early, giving the opportunity for the Department of Treasury and Finance to provide timely support. There is a good governance principle that is very apt here, and that is: bad news early. When something is not going well you want to know about it early, not late.

The bill clarifies the roles and responsibilities of accountable officers, boards and chief finance officers, including strengthening reporting requirements. It provides the Minister for Finance with the ability to include or exclude certain agencies from particular provisions of the act where that makes sense, and it gives incoming treasurers more flexibility around post-election budget updates. It is important to note that the bill removes the mandatory requirement to publish the budget update but does not prevent a future Treasurer from doing so if they want to. The reality is that there is no significant difference between the information published in the pre-election budget update in November of an election year and the budget update a mere few weeks later in December. Let me point out that the reason why there is not much difference is because we get on with things straightaway. The election happens, then Labor is sworn in and the legislation and the work begins straight away – virtually no difference. Of course if a new government were elected and they took a couple of months to schedule the opening of Parliament and they had no agenda to do anything, well, then maybe things might change in several months.

The bill also adjusts the timing for the September quarterly report so it is delivered by 15 December, aligning reporting with better data analysis. Sometimes July financial reporting can take a little bit extra because it is calculating totals for the end of the year, and you do not want to be messing with the finance department while they are trying to work that stuff out. So giving this more appropriate timeline suits in that regard as well. It requires portfolio ministers to consult with the Minister for Finance before creating or abolishing agencies, ensuring strong financial governance from the very beginning. This is hardly loosening things up; it is tightening things up. It updates the regulations and the powers to issue directions so that the act is clear, current and workable. It abolishes outdated processes such as financial warrants. In fact abolishing warrants is a great case in point of exactly why this bill is needed. This particular reform is both symbolic and practical in modernising Victoria's financial framework. The warrant system is a historical relic, an anachronism that persists only in Victoria and Western Australia. All other states and jurisdictions have abolished the warrants.

The warrant was included in the very first Victorian Constitution in 1855. The Crown needed a mechanism to physically control the assets provided to fund the colony. Gold was the standard at the time. Back then a warrant was the legal instrument issued by the Treasurer that gave the departments permission to access and spend public funds, and that meant, literally, to access the vaults. The warrant process provided an assurance that amounts of gold had been lawfully drawn and were duly recorded as such in government ledgers, manually so. Once money was removed from the vaults, any tracking of how it was used involved manual records maintained by the entity that had received the money. Obviously gold is no longer the currency of the state, and it is appropriate that more contemporary controls are in place.

Funds are dispersed electronically now, with every transaction tracked through sophisticated financial management systems. I would like to point that out to those opposite. As I said, it is conservatism: 'Let's just keep the warrants. Let's just use gold and have someone go with a trolley down to the vault, walk in, hand over a piece of paper and take a pile of gold out for their department.' Really? That is the definition of conservatism: change nothing. Strong requirements to provide audited annual reports demonstrate how funds are allocated, rendering warrants completely outdated. We no longer physically move money around. There are a few of us that have cash but not very often. We do it virtually, actually through computer systems.

The warrant system is still in place. This bill abolishes it. It currently operates as a duplicate system. It literally still happens. Currently the same information that is provided by the appropriation bills, which receives the Governor's royal assent and is based on the audited budget papers, then goes back to the Auditor-General, and the Governor has a warrant to be approved once more. So you can see the warrant system has become completely redundant, like perhaps those opposite. It consumes significant administrative time and resources, resources that could be better spent on service delivery, on building things, on doing things and on reforming things. A parallel would be a requirement to sweep up horse

manure on the street – if we still had that in place – when actually everybody is currently being transported by cars. Why would you keep that law in place? Why would you keep doing that?

A member: You wouldn't.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Yes, exactly. Examples such as this show that the changes in this bill might sound technical but they are very, very important, and they make clear the government's expectations of departments and agencies. Labor governments have a strong tradition of enshrining in legislation robust public financial reporting. Government delivers more, partners with more organisations and manages more complex budgets than ever before. Our financial management laws need to reflect that reality, and the bill ensures that this is the case.

We are making the role of the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance central to that oversight. Every department and agency will report to them and alert them to the sign of any budget risk. This will allow early intervention, as I mentioned earlier, early solutions and better outcomes. And by writing into law the expectation that public bodies operate within their budgets, we are embedding stronger discipline, clearer rules and more consistent oversight. It is about making sure the public sector uses its resources sustainably and transparently. Just as Victorian households are watching every dollar, so too should our government. Strengthening financial performance helps us deliver surpluses and supports economic growth. It also allows us to keep investing in what matters most – education, health and easing cost-of-living pressures. That is exactly what we have done in the 2025–26 budget. That budget delivers real help with the cost of living, it invests in the services that we rely on and it returns Victoria to a surplus.

In conclusion, I would say that we do not need to conserve the current status quo. What we need to do is respond to the new and changing operating environment, the new and changing technical environment and of course the changing needs of the Victorian community, and this bill responds to those challenges.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:51): It is not old-fashioned or out of touch to believe in transparency and accountability. I found that contribution quite bizarre. I wish that we could go to the vault, but the fact is our currency has not been backed by gold for an extremely long time. Reality check: Victoria has more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. So whatever the attempt was to put down conservatives or to put down the Liberal Party, I do not think it landed at all.

I rise today to speak to the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is a bill we oppose, not because we do not support financial reform but because this bill represents a strategy to avoid scrutiny, to delay and conceal budgetary exposure and to rewrite the rules of public finance. I found it so bizarre, the whole analogy that was supposedly about gold versus internet banking, essentially. No, this is not about that at all; this is about transparency and accountability, something that this bill weakens.

This government presents this legislation as a modernisation, but it is yet another bald-faced example of doublespeak. The Minister for Finance stood before the Assembly and said:

We continue to demonstrate targeted and disciplined financial management ...

And he promised it will:

... improve accountability and transparency across the public sector ...

He said:

It is a signpost ... of ... sound and sustainable financial management.

But let us allow the numbers to speak for themselves. Victoria's debt is forecast to hit nearly \$200 billion by 2028, hardly the gold bullion that we are going to the safe to get out that Ms Ermacora spoke about – if only. With all her trashing and bagging of so-called conservative government, maybe

we should have conserved some of our wealth and Victorians would be having a lot less of a cost-of-living crisis and a much better quality of life, but I will let that one slide anyway.

Interest payments are expected to rise to nearly \$11 billion per year. Let us break that down into what it costs per day: \$29 million per day in interest payments alone, over \$1 million per hour. This government has either forgotten the basic responsibility of financial stewardship or never understood it at all. Governments exist not as a creator of wealth but as custodians of the wealth created by Victorians. There is no such thing as government money; there is taxpayer money. Every dollar that this government spends originates from the productive efforts of Victorian families, Victorian workers and Victorian small businesses, yet this government's track record suggests a profound disconnect from that reality, and I think there is no better example of that than the speech we just heard before this one.

Infrastructure projects like the Suburban Rail Loop have negative cost-benefit ratios but continue to have billions of dollars invested despite federal warnings – and not just from the coalition government, from their own Labor government. This and other projects are labelled bad debt for bad infrastructure. We should ask: if the exorbitant costs are not benefiting Victorians today and in the future, who are the real beneficiaries of these projects? In fact this government has consigned the state's taxpayers to decades of debt and servitude and reduced living standards for projects that serve political vanity and, in some cases, with what we saw with the CFMEU, criminal interests rather than the public that they are put there to serve. S&P and Moody's have warned that Victoria risks further credit downgrades if it fails to demonstrate genuine fiscal discipline. They specifically state that Victoria's governance and investment decision quality are 'lagging those of many highly rated ... peers'. That is not financial discipline; that is financial delusion, and it is intergenerational theft. The debt that this government has racked up will not be paid off by our children. It will not even be paid off by our children's children. But children in Victoria are born into the debt that this government has racked up.

I find it offensive to sit here and to be raising things about transparency and accountability and have people from the government make jokes about the good old days – trivialising it – when we actually had resources and we actually had gold that could back up some of the building in this state. It is pretty appalling, and I think it is embarrassing, to come in and to trivialise and to downplay the amount of tax that our state pays. It costs more to grow a tomato in this state than any other area in Australia because of the taxes and charges. I think it is interesting to note that key cabinet members in charge of Treasury and finance all have backgrounds in arts and law, and that could explain their laser-focused pursuit of ideological commitments ahead of real-life fiscal responsibility. I do not think it is right to come into this chamber to represent the people of Victoria and to trivialise the mess that we are in and the pain that they are going through.

I think that it is unsurprising then that, when we examine the bill's actual provisions, we discover that there is something far more troubling. It is a systematic dismantling of the very transparency mechanisms that allow Victorians to hold the government accountable. The trademark of a democracy is a government that can be held accountable, and this is weakening that. This bill did not emerge in isolation. It followed its predecessor, the Financial Management and Constitution Acts Amendment Bill 2017, which lapsed at the end of the 58th Parliament without passing. While both bills share the stated goal of modernising Victoria's financial legislation, their approaches reveal a telling evolution in the government's priorities. Where the 2017 bill sought to streamline but retain public-facing updates, this 2025 version enables selective withholding of key budget data. Where the earlier bill extended controls over definitions, this bill empowers discretion to reduce reporting obligations entirely. The pattern is clear. We have moved from reform to concealment, from transparency to tactical opaqueness.

In a Westminster democracy the people's representatives must have access to all financial information necessary to make informed decisions. More critically, the people themselves, who ultimately bear the cost of government decisions, deserve to know how their money is being spent, particularly before they cast their votes. We must remember a fundamental truth, one that was championed by Sir Robert

Menzies, which he impressed upon Australians: governments possess no money of their own. Every dollar in government coffers is the Victorian people's money. Government is not some magical treasury that creates wealth from thin air, but rather it is an apparatus for collecting revenue from citizens through taxation and redistributing it through public expenditure. The basic arithmetic is inescapable: what all citizens receive from the government can never exceed what the citizens contribute to the government in the first place, something that seems to be completely lost on this government. This principle makes financial transparency not just desirable but democratically essential. When citizens are compelled to fund government through their taxes, they absolutely have a right to know how those funds are being used. When the government can selectively withhold financial information, when they can exempt agencies from reporting requirements at their discretion and when they can delay budget updates until after elections are decided, that is not modernising; they are betraying the fundamental agreement between citizens and the state.

Perhaps no provision better illustrates this bill's true purpose than the removal of mandatory September quarterly budget updates in election years. Let us be up-front about what this means. Voters will no longer have access to updated financial figures in the lead-up to state elections. Just let that sink in for a minute. Independent economist Saul Eslake has called this crucial budget update essential 'regardless of any looming election'. He notes:

Normally there would be information released between the pre-election update and the ordinary timing of the mid-year review ... that would likely be relevant to the budget numbers ...

He emphasised:

The budget update is very important, it gives you an account of what has changed, that is the economic and other assumptions, and will give you an update on any policy decisions the government has made including election commitments

He particularly makes the point that transparency becomes more important in the event of a change of government. How convenient then that this government seeks to eliminate this 18 months before the 2026 election is held.

This bill grants the Minister for Finance discretionary power to exempt certain public bodies from financial reporting requirements. According to the minister, the amendments will create:

... the settings for a more risk-based approach to financial management by enabling smaller agencies to be more agile ...

And yet while the minister highlights small agencies, the very plausible risk that 'declared' bodies could include big agencies and major statutory authorities such as the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, IBAC and Court Services Victoria under these changes means it is entirely possible that the minister could exempt major statutory authorities from financial reporting obligations, including risk reporting.

The implementation of this provision becomes starkly apparent when we consider the Suburban Rail Loop, the project that exemplifies everything wrong with this government's approach to financial governance. Since former Premier Daniel Andrews made his captain's call to announce the SRL, it has been shrouded in secrecy and deception. Infrastructure Australia never reviewed this project. No business case was ever developed prior to the announcement. The SRL was not even disclosed to Victoria's transport department beforehand, because the government knew it would object. Recent revelations show the depths of this government's duplicity. Modelling provided years ago to Premier Jacinta Allan but kept secret showed catastrophic passenger demand projections. By mid-century, when Melbourne has 8 million people, there would only be 24,000 daily trips between the first two SRL stations while trains between Sunshine and Footscray would carry 270,000 passengers. As one Labor minister admitted:

This is exactly why they didn't bring the SRL to the general Cabinet ...

They knew western suburbs and northern suburbs MPs would be angry.

This project's cost has exploded from an initial \$50 billion to beyond \$200 billion, yet the government has attempted to disguise this fiscal catastrophe by rebranding the SRL as a housing project and failing to mention it in the latest budget. This is a government which conceals even from its own cabinet members, saying, 'There's nothing to see here.' They are completely opaque. They need to, I think, front up and be honest. This is precisely why declared body exemptions are so dangerous. They institutionalise such deception, allowing politically sensitive entities like the SRL to vanish from public scrutiny entirely. They create a dual regime where transparency becomes a matter of ministerial discretion rather than a legal obligation.

This is not reform; it is institutionalisation of secretive accountability, designed to hide projects, and it epitomises financial irresponsibility.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:06): I rise to speak on behalf of the Greens on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I will commence by noting that it is no secret that the Victorian government is under serious financial pressure. We have seen escalating debt, significant cost blowouts on major projects and also a narrowing of the tax base, which already collects little revenue beyond duties on property and gambling, for example. While some of these issues I note have been caused by factors outside of government control – that is, things like a global pandemic and global conflicts, which have triggered spiralling ensuing inflation – I also note that much of the state's current predicament is attributable to poor decisions that have been made by state government. It is too often reactive to the latest headline, desperate to change a narrative by governing by press release and, quite frankly, posing for pictures with a hard hat on rather than working out how much one of these projects will actually cost. How else can we find ourselves in a situation where we spend a billion dollars on an empty prison or find ourselves in a situation where we are paying \$600 million to not host the Commonwealth Games, just as some examples. The fact is that even with these difficult financial headwinds the government too often have prioritised spending money on what they think is good politics over what is actually good for people in our state.

Considering those points that I have just raised, one can be tempted to be drawn in by some of the statements we hear from the opposition – slogans like 'Labor can't manage money'. But then you take a look at the opposition and what they have actually put on the table to date, and there is a bit more to speak on there. When we look at the, to be quite frank, Trumpian Liberal financial announcements that have been made so far, which would narrow the tax base even further through repealing taxes and providing more tax concessions for investors across the community, for example, under these measures the state debt would balloon even more than what we are seeing under Labor right now. You could also consider that while we hear the opposition cry out about the government's lack of financial acumen, lack of planning and lack of transparency, when push comes to shove, as we have seen in this term of Parliament, they team up with the government to oppose Greens amendments that would do things like strengthen our budget oversight committee processes – the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – so that we could apply real scrutiny on government spending and on our state budgets.

Without descending into throwing punches any which way here in the contribution to debate today, the truth is that to date, from what I have seen in this term of Parliament from Labor and the Liberals, they are all as bad as each other when it comes to financial management and budget accountability, to be quite frank. Both parties have been committed to doing as little as possible to make governments accountable and transparent because either they are right now in government and it is perhaps not in their interest to do so or potentially they think they might soon be in government and therefore they do not want to implement changes that would put them under more pressure should they be in that position. That is why I think we have seen this term and in the past on matters of political integrity, on transparency and on government accountability that often improvements follow when the Greens or the crossbench bring changes to this place to force either the Liberals or Labor, whoever is in government, to act.

Broadly speaking, though, looking at this legislation, the bill at face value proposes to strengthen budgeting and reporting requirements of government agencies, to clarify the legislated accountabilities

for accountable officers and chief finance officers and to reduce what are referred to as duplication and inefficiencies to make the state's financial management procedures more reflective of what would be described as modern financial practices. To that end the Greens are supportive of the bill, but we do not think it goes far enough, particularly in regard to improving government transparency when it comes to our spending and our overall financial performance. The Greens have been saying for some time – we have been saying it in here for a while – that the only way to end government waste and cost blowouts is to have laws that actually force government ministers to be transparent and accountable about their spending. It is not enough to make statements that pretend to be about better financial management, as too often we see from the opposition; we actually need to be making changes in this place to entrench improvements in our legislation to make governments more accountable and transparent about their spending and about their budgeting, whoever is in power. Surely we can agree that should be in our interest here.

For over a decade state governments of all stripes have been tabling hundreds of departmental and agency annual reports – tens of thousands of pages of financial and performance reporting – on a single day, 1 November. It is a process that is both deeply cynical and a very effective ploy inasmuch that it buries much, if not all, of the bad news contained in these reports from the public, at least for a week or two, by which time the media news cycle may have moved on. It has become such a perversely celebrated tradition in our state that the day even has its own afforded name, dump day, an ongoing testament to the lack of government transparency in this state. The Greens amendments here today seek to end dump day by requiring these reports to be tabled sooner.

Other amendments we have brought today relate to Treasurer's advances and seek to provide better reporting of their use by midyear financial reporting, as would be required to be tabled. Victoria is fairly unique, I would say, in its excessive use of Treasurer's advances as part of its financial management. Treasurer's advances are also often referred to colloquially as 'the government's secret credit card'. These are payments that are supposed to cover emergency or unforeseen expenses outside of the formal budgeted appropriations. But we have seen increasingly in Victoria this emergency credit card used not just for emergencies but for projects and programs that really, one would think, should be properly costed and outlined in the annual budget. Because this expenditure is paid from Treasurer's advances and not comprehensively outlined in the budget process, as with other spending, the first the public sometimes finds out about it can be over 12 months after it has been paid. It is really quite outrageous when you think that you or I spend 20 bucks on a credit card and we receive a statement from the bank within a month, but the state government can spend tens of billions of dollars in secret and not have to report on it for more than 12 months. To that end, the Greens have amendments to improve financial transparency and accountability of government by addressing both these issues I have mentioned, one being so-called dump day and the other being Treasurer's advances, and I kindly request that these amendments be circulated now. I would also like to acknowledge, in so doing, the good-faith consultation and feedback that we have had from right across the Parliament on these matters, particularly noting consultation and feedback that my colleagues received from the offices of the Treasurer and also the Minister for Finance in putting these amendments together.

In concluding my remarks, I will remind the house that the opposition have stated clearly on the public record during this term that if they are elected they will abolish dump day and excessive use of Treasurer's advances. I also note that the Treasurer has publicly committed to being more transparent around the use of Treasurer's advances. In that sense I am very hopeful, given Labor and the Liberals have indicated public support for what these amendments seek to achieve and that the crossbench have generally also been united in supporting more transparency and accountability in government, that we may be in the rare position today of being able to find unanimous support for these amendments. There is absolutely much more work to do, but passing the amendments proposed by the Greens today on integrity would be a significant step in the right direction for our state and a great credit to all members of this Parliament. In saying that, I commend this bill to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:14): I rise to speak in support of the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill represents a significant stride towards enhancing the financial governance framework of our state, ensuring that Victoria remains resilient and responsive to the fiscal challenges of the 21st century. This bill is ultimately about sound fiscal management, an issue that has come up a number of times this year. Members of the Legislative Council are certainly aware of and do not need to be reminded of the sound fiscal management which allowed the Treasurer to hand down a budget surplus back in May. Likewise, members on the other side of the chamber have no doubt read the government's fiscal strategy and know that our fiscal management is starting to show results. It is this sort of sound fiscal management that will enable us to stabilise debt as a proportion of gross state product by next year's budget. We are on track to achieve this result by sticking to a fiscal strategy over the course of years.

Just as we promote fiscal prudence in our budgets each year, it is important that we are promoting sound fiscal management in the public sector through bills such as this. This bill proposes to ensure that departments and public bodies are using resources in a fiscally sustainable way, demonstrating yet another example of this government's commitment to ensuring sound financial management. Sound fiscal management is important because without it we would not be able to have so many of the things that we Victorians depend upon. The public relies on state governments to deliver some of the most important services. The health, education and public transport systems are in constant need of expansion and improvement, and it all has to be paid for. Of course I have recited the Allan Labor government's achievements on these issues many times in this chamber. Building 100 new schools, nine new or expanded hospitals and the Metro Tunnel are achievements that deserve to be brought up again and again and again.

I think it is also important to remember, on the other side of the coin, the tax cuts that this government has been able to deliver. I know that small businesses in my constituency, the Southern Metropolitan Region, have been benefiting from the lifting of the payroll tax threshold at the beginning of this financial year. When we came to government in 2014 the payroll tax-free threshold was \$550,000. As of 1 July this year it is \$1 million, and small businesses across the state are benefiting because of it.

This bill also seeks to make sure that the Financial Management Act 1994 and the financial framework of the state are fit for purpose and that the public sector is resilient to future changes, as well as to ensure that Victoria's public sector financial management legislative framework complements and supports administrative reforms to manage fiscal risk. Not only does this drive better financial discipline within departments and public bodies, but it also increases central oversight and financial management capability and accountability.

I find it difficult to comprehend why those opposite would not be supporting this bill. Updating, modernising and improving the financial reporting obligations is something that we on this side of the house take very seriously. Circumstances, technology, reporting obligations and different mechanisms change over time, and making sure that budgetary and other processes are contained within this bill, as well as other complementary bills, upholds that the most updated mechanisms are crucial. This legislation is recognition of this. The diversity and the speed at which many of those industries and sectors have evolved and changed mean we need to make sure that we are taking the necessary steps to provide those processes. That is why across the nine important changes to the act this work has been done in a diligent and dedicated manner, and that is why this bill is supported by the government.

As a government, we have always invested in the services and infrastructure that Victorians need to keep our economy strong, and despite numerous challenges of our government we have continued to effectively map plans and solutions that protect jobs and grow our economy. We are focused on the important work of governing and outlining what was announced in the budget, and more than a decade of preceding budgets, because we on this side of the chamber know and understand that local communities are at their best when they are supported by a government that listens to them and delivers for them – a government that makes sure to provide opportunities for our growing communities, particularly in our growth corridors. We are making sure that no matter where you live right across

this state, opportunities exist through the budgetary process as well as through a range of programs and initiatives that exist within local communities. This is a most important obligation, of course alongside keeping people safe, that the government can continue to work on.

This brings me to the Allan Labor government's fiscal strategy, which I alluded to earlier. This plan, which was written at the height of the COVID pandemic, lays out a plan to bring budget back into surplus and get debt under control. We did this so that we could show Victorians that while we would engage in significant deficit spending during the crisis, we were not doing so in a way that was unrestrained or reckless. We faced significant economic challenges at the time, and it was important that we showed business and the public that the government were not abandoning them in difficult times. Those members of the chamber who are familiar with the basic principles of economics would know that at a time like that, significant deficit spending is absolutely justified. But they would also know that deficits bring about challenges of their own, those being that a government needs to plan for and manage the deficit. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:20): I rise to speak on what is romantically called the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is romantic in the sense that it is a fairytale. I was sitting here waxing and waning between what tone I should adopt for a speech on a budget. I think it is pointless getting angry about it and it would be less than honourable to be resigned about it, because I have got a duty to represent the points of view of Victorians and the interests of Victorians around it. But I will start at the top. Again, it is one of these bills where what is on the label is not what is inside the can. It is like the tough bail bill, which was adding another layer of lettuce to its toughness. It is like the debt reduction strategy that successfully stabilised debt from \$170 billion-odd to \$180 billion-odd and then finally stabilised it at \$194 billion. That is a great debt stabilisation. I think next year it will definitely have stabilised to over \$200 billion. That shows again that what you see on the cover is not what you are going to get in the can.

At a time when we are \$194 billion in debt, we are paying \$10 billion in interest, which is larger than any one source of state revenue. It is going to be \$36 billion over the next four years in interest. At a time when spending is uncontrolled, when you look through any of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee papers, you will see 'to be confirmed' on the state's largest project. You would think at this point in time that the last thing you would do is actually weaken governance and oversight of it. If you were running a business right now, you would be certainly asking yourself the questions: how come we have to comply with every financial reporting? How come we do not get extensions when our land tax comes due? Why don't we get these exemptions? But it is okay, the government is always entitled to make rules for itself.

I will take up Mr Puglielli's points. He wants to legislate in effect what have always been Westminster conventions around transparency and financial reporting. What this bill actually seeks to do is abolish Westminster conventions on financial reporting. I have often noted that Victoria is in a curious situation. The Westminster system was never designed for a government like this, because the Westminster system relies heavily on conventions of ministerial accountability, accountability to Parliament, reporting transparency and fiscal transparency, and there are various bodies and organs set up to do this. What this legislation aims to do is critically undermine and weaken most of those, and it does so in the most nakedly transparent political way to avoid accountability. Even more so, it does so because it is leading into an election year. The checks and balances that you would have in a normal Westminster system, including warrants and having weights and balances where the Governor will actually have to sign off expenditure – to say that it is an anachronism can only be said by someone who does not want to be accountable for what they are doing, does not want any daylight on it. To say that there can be exceptions at the discretion of the minister as to who gets to report and when they have to report – as if that is not actively incentivising corruption. You are simply opening the doors and saying, 'Waltz on through.' You can hide. If it is inconvenient for them this week, there is now no constitutional mechanism to stop them doing that: 'Just let it rip.'

Why would you do that now? You are a government that has got so many projects so over budget that there are going to be ramifications, so the last thing you would want is the disinfectant of sunlight being cast upon them. This is a government which, every year it has been in government, on average has missed its budget by \$14 billion – every single year. In that environment they want to say, ‘Let’s have less reporting.’ I can see the motive. I can see the intention. Why would you want to have to keep putting up your report card when your report card shows you have got it wrong again and again and again and the community’s credibility is stretched further and further?

The people of Victoria are taking note of this. You cannot rule by press release – you cannot say that you are going to do X, Y, Z and never have a plan of how you are going to fund it. We have a situation with the Suburban Rail Loop where the government has admitted it cannot raise the revenue from value capture tax, but it also does not have a figure for how much the project is actually going to cost. We have the biggest project in Australia with no revenue model, no funding costing model in our state’s financial reports. It is a scandal – an utter scandal – at a time when our credit rating is in jeopardy, as we all know. I am sure that this government claims it has a budget surplus this year; it has sort of manufactured and engineered a budget surplus. I wonder whether that surplus even exists any longer. I am sure if we had some up-to-date reporting it would not be there. I am sure it would be gone. It is ephemeral because it is fake, like everything this government does. Everything is fake; it is a pretence. The tough bail laws are not tough. The debt reduction strategies do not reduce debt. There are no costings for the SRL. They are \$14 billion out in their budgets every single year on average and rolling over debt, \$30 billion in Treasury bonds, with no plan going forward. It is a –

Ryan Batchelor: What’s your plan?

Richard WELCH: What? You are the one trying to reduce accountability. This is not a debate on that; this is a debate on you.

Ryan Batchelor: So it’s a debate on that?

Richard WELCH: You’re the topic of conversation here. The removal of quarterly reporting prior to the election is probably the most transparently, nakedly corrupt element of this bill. The idea that the people of Victoria should go to vote without knowing where the books are at –

Ryan Batchelor: There’s a pre-election budget update. Do you not know the law?

Richard WELCH: So why are you cancelling this, then? What is the problem? Why are you cancelling this? If everything is fine and dandy, why shouldn’t the people of Victoria know it? We do actually live in a democracy. I can see and we can all see that opens the door to naked pork-barrelling within the last months of an election period with no transparency to it whatsoever. Then, conveniently after the election, we will get the real figures, and you will have the apparatus of government to paper over what you have done. In fact it is not so different to what Labor have done in practice in the last couple of elections. We can have the airport rail, we can have SRL, we can have hospital investment, we can have all these things, we can have all our cake and eat it too – but we never do. This government is an untruthful government at best. That is a very generous characterisation of what you are. You are untruthful to the Victorian people. You are leading us to a financial apocalypse and you do not care, because you know that you can announce something, you can spend other people’s money with abandon and you will just kick the can down the road to the next generation for them to deal with.

We oppose this bill. It is bad for democracy. It is bad for the Westminster system. People, particularly the crossbench, should not support this. Beware of what you wish for. If it is going to be good for the goose, it will be good for the gander. I do not like the direction we are going in. Financial reporting should be transparent. Financial reporting should have consistent reporting, period to period. I was on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and it was almost impossible to find like-for-like items, period to period. It breaches the most fundamental rules of accounting, and it is done for the purposes of camouflage, deceit, distraction and obfuscation. Enough is enough. Victoria wants light at the end of the tunnel. They want a future beyond Labor, because the culture of Labor now is irreversible. It is

a self-fulfilling machine of debt and disguise, and ultimately it is going to end in significant problems for this state – well, it already has. Look at how many institutions have been hollowed out, and due to insufficient reporting –

Members interjecting.

Richard WELCH: This party of cuts over there, Labor, have hollowed out every institution and kept a bit of a facade going. We know what has happened to the police, we know what is happening in health services, we know what has happened in education – hollowed out from the inside. We know what has happened with fisheries officers. We know how they drag their feet on drought support. We know what they have done in domestic violence and emergency housing. We know what they have done on youth intervention programs. We know what they have done with the children's courts. We know across the board they have hollowed out this state and then are still, like predators, going around looking for every last cent of tax from every corner. The sole purpose this government has to exist is to tax, spend and borrow, which is a hauntingly familiar refrain for a Labor government, isn't it? Tax, borrow and spend – hauntingly familiar. Where will it end?

The people of Victoria want hope. They want something different. They would like someone who respects the way the laws are meant to be made and finances are meant to run. But they are not only unwilling to do so, they are frankly incapable, because it is in their DNA to tax and it is in their DNA to borrow, because they do not like to address things at their source. They do not like to address the underlying fundamental problems; they like to spend their way out of a problem – spend, spend, spend – because actually fixing things is too hard. I think it is too hard for them probably because they are a bit of an exhausted government, but I think it is too hard for them intellectually as well to grasp the big problems. Spending is always a nice solution when you are spending other people's money or when you are borrowing money and there is no accountability. But there will be a reckoning. Victorian people will deliver a reckoning soon enough, I would hope. I will conclude my contribution there.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:32): I would also like to say a few words on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The fundamental functions of the state are to protect against force, fraud and theft and enforce contracts – the very, very basic functions of the state. If a government cannot manage these basic functions of the state, then they should not be doing more than that. We have got a government at the moment that interferes and thinks that it wants to interfere in every aspect of people's lives. It has grown larger and larger and larger and larger, and as we know with any organisation, as it grows larger it makes errors. There are inefficiencies in the way that communication works within the government, and things go wrong. We have got the situation now where the government is trying to do everything but cannot do the basics. Almost every day there are new arson attacks that go unsolved. There are home invasions that happen all the time.

Yet at the same time as these very, very basic functions of the state go unmanaged or not managed well, we have the government saying, 'Well, there's this wonderful thing called work from home, and it works very well for lots of employees and lots of businesses.' In this weird style they frame this idea as a right, totally demonstrating that they have no understanding of the concept of rights whatsoever. They say, 'Well, if it's something that we like, we must make it a right.' So now they say that they are going to interfere in the management of businesses throughout this state by saying workers have a right to work from home two days a week.

This shows a government that has gone too far. It cannot even manage the most basic stuff, and yet it thinks it can manage private businesses. I mean, really? You only have to look at what has happened in this term of Parliament and in the last term of Parliament, at the number of projects that have overrun because of mismanagement and corruption in many cases and projects that never went ahead. The obvious one was the Commonwealth Games. There is stuff from the last term of Parliament – we still have not got the documents on the HEPA filters that went out to schools. We do not even know if they still use them or whether they used them at all. There is so much mismanagement.

There are a couple of things in this bill that I am okay with. One thing it does that I think is good is legislate that departments have to give notice if they are expecting to exceed budget. This is a good thing. You get a heads-up in advance that you might be going to exceed budget. That is a good thing. Some of the other things that it does, like removing the constitutional requirement for a warrant – yes, okay, this does seem pretty outdated, and maybe it is time to get rid of that. But some of these other oversight mechanisms being removed I think is a big problem. I would like to see far more transparent reporting on contracts, procurement and this sort of thing. But ultimately, the bigger problem here is the government thinking that it can do so much when it just cannot.

Another good example, which is a big area of government spending, is procurement. In the normal world, when you procure something, you look at, ‘What’s the reputation of the person I’m buying the product or service from, what’s its cost performance, is it good quality and is it going to fit the need and be what I want?’ These are the rational concerns that people have in the normal world, but in the government world they say, ‘We’re not going to just consider price, quality and the reputation of the person that we’re buying from. We’re going to say, “How do you manage your workforce? What sort of workers do you have in your workforce?”’ They use the concept of procurement to force out from the public sector into the private sector their ideology – their belief system. They force it out to the entire private sector, and it is like the government says, ‘If you don’t operate your business in a way that enacts our ideology or our beliefs, then we’re not going to do business with you. You’re not going to get a government contract.’ And what ends up happening, as we have seen, is that these procurement requirements have unintended consequences, and some of them are horrific.

I have spoken before about one of these unintended consequences of procurement policies by the government. In the last term of Parliament we passed the Gender Equality Act 2020. Anyone would think that this sounds like a great idea. We want more equality for men and women and this sort of thing, and it sounds great, but what ended up happening, especially in the construction sector, which is mostly dominated by men, was that we ended up with situations where labour hire companies were infiltrated by organised crime to supply labour that would fit the diversity requirements. It is absolutely outrageous what has happened here. I do not know whether this has been cleaned up yet or not, but the incentives for crime and corruption were created by the government itself. What they should be doing when they are looking at procurement is going back and saying, ‘We should be buying the best product or service for the best price from a reputable person,’ and not trying to force their belief system onto an entire economy when it is totally unnatural to do that and creates all of these opportunities for mismanagement, for corruption, for inefficiencies, for communication problems – all sorts of issues like this. This is a big problem. The government need to do less, and the things that they do do need to have better transparency so that Victorians, the taxpayers who are paying for everything – either the taxpayer today or their children in the future, if the government are racking up debt – know how this money is being spent.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:39): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, which delivers on a range of measures that the government has committed to implementing to modernise the Financial Management Act 1994 (FMA) here in Victoria, the act that governs how the state’s finances are managed at a very operational level. It was first passed in 1994 and has not had substantial revision or amendment in 20 years. It was very interesting to listen to some of the contributions made in the chamber, particularly by those opposite, who have said we do not need to modernise, we do not need to change our practices –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Batchelor is verballing, and he has not even come close. I have listened to every single contribution, and not one person said what he has just alleged.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): I ask Mr Batchelor to return to the topic.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am very happy to return to a discussion about whether the Liberal Party believes that we need to remove anachronisms from legislation. What we have before us today is a piece of amending legislation that seeks to make some important changes to the Financial

Management Act 1994, some of which are anachronistic – so anachronistic that they were described as such by the former Liberal Treasurer in 1994 when the act was first put into the Parliament. So if those currently opposite have some sensitivity to being described as anachronistic, being described as unable to modernise, that is an issue that they are going to have to deal with and work through, because this government is absolutely committed to making sure that the financial management arrangements we have in this state are responsible, are modern and are delivering for the people of Victoria.

What the government has demonstrated both through the legislation that is before us today but also through the way that we have approached responsible budget management in the last period, particularly in the last budget, is that what this government is focused on is delivering the services that our community needs and ensuring that we have got a fiscal strategy that enables sound financial management right across the public sector and that improves accountability, oversight and sustainability of our fiscal settings across the public sector here in Victoria. That is exactly what this legislation is a part of and exactly what our entire budget strategy that underpins it is. This legislation is about making sure that the rules that govern the way our financial management system is up to date and modern and in accordance with the realities of the way that government works today – something that those opposite may be completely unfamiliar with and something that we hope they will not be familiar with again for a very long time.

We are delivering on our commitment in the 2024–25 budget to undertaking a review of the FMA to make sure that it is still fit for purpose and that it is not just delivering on best practice from 1994 but indeed that it both makes the legislation consistent with emergent financial practices and current best practice financial practices across the public sector and ensures that we have the settings that we need in place going forward. We know a lot has changed since 1994. Maybe those opposite do not understand much has changed since 1994. Perhaps they would rather be in 1994; we cannot tell.

There are a lot of things that we have today that we did not have in 1994. A second rail tunnel in Melbourne is probably one good example of something that is very different today than it was 30 years ago, but I am not going to get distracted by a comparison between Victoria in the mid-2020s and Victoria in the mid-1990s, because it will not do anyone any good, least of all Mr Welch, who will not be able to contain himself.

The bill does make a series of important amendments to provide government departments and agencies with the principle of responsibly operating within their budget. It identifies potential risks to that in a timely manner that departments and agencies have to have through enhanced notification processes; ensures clarity in roles and responsibilities for accountable officers, for boards, for chief financial officers and others; provides the power to include or exclude agencies from the operation of certain provisions of the FMA; and makes some changes to the way that particularly the relationship between the timing of the pre-election budget update and the budget update operate in election years, a point which those opposite seem to have absolutely no understanding of whatsoever, judging by their contributions.

They seem to have forgotten the fact, given some of the outrageous claims that were being made by the opposition when talking about the level of information that is provided to Victorians about the state of Victoria's fiscal position in election years. I want to make this crystal clear, because we know that the Liberal Party likes to base its claims on things that are false: what is very, very clear under the terms of the FMA is that the pre-election budget update continues to be provided by the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance to the Victorian people after the writs have been issued for a general election. An independent source of information on the financial position of the state of Victoria is provided to the people by the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance before Victorians vote. That is what is in the law. That is what those opposite do not seem to understand at all, based on their contributions to the debate today. So I will not take any sort of high and mighty lecturing from them about the provisions of the financial management bill when they clearly have not even read it. If they had, they would know their contributions were just wrong. We will not take any lectures from them when they do not understand how the law is written.

The bill also makes important changes to ensure financial governance by requiring that portfolio ministers consult with the Minister for Finance on the creation or cessation of agencies and, importantly, we think, abolishes the anachronism of financial warrants which duplicate existing processes. I know that those opposite particularly have problems getting rid of anachronisms, and we see that every day in their considerations in this chamber.

I will leave my contribution here. The bill is an important part. It delivers on a commitment that we made in the 2024–25 budget process to review the FMA as an important part of ensuring that the financial management settings we have in this state assist us to deliver the services, infrastructure and support the Victorian people need, and to do so within a responsible framework of fiscal management, ensuring that we continue to deliver what Victorians need.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:48): As I rise to make a contribution on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, I want to reflect on what an oxymoron that is, coming from the Allan government. ‘Financial management and the Allan government’ is certainly an oxymoron. Indeed it stemmed from amendments to the Financial Management Act 1994. Now, for those of us who can remember back that far, and I know I certainly can, that came off the end of a dark period in Victoria’s history called the Cain–Kirner government. When we passed through that and out the other side, there was massive debt. There was massive debt across the state of eye-watering proportion. At that time the then Liberal and National government came in and enacted the Financial Management Act 1994. It was also coupled with the period of time when in the federal Parliament we had the Hawke–Keating government that was also stripping away the fabric of good financial management in that scene. So in many ways, we are duplicating – history is repeating itself in terms of this amending bill. We have now got an Andrews-cum-Allan government 11 years in, a tired government, that has introduced 63 new or increased taxes. It says ‘financial management’, but it should have ‘mismanagement’ in the title of this bill. It is sincerely eye-watering and concerning, the level of debt that this country and this state is in. In terms of the forward projections, as we have heard from members on our side, there is \$194 billion in net debt. That is just frightening for our children. The children born today have to wear that burden.

The Nationals and the Liberals are certainly deeply concerned about the erosion of financial accountability, the erosion of transparency, particularly in the light of this woeful mismanagement. One of the areas of the bill, just to wander into them for the sake of this debate, is the erosion of oversight in terms of the removal of the Governor’s issued warrants. Labor now no longer has to formally approach the Governor and say, ‘Can we access further money?’ It erodes the layer of scrutiny around not only the Governor but the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General has certainly had things to say about this government – fiercely independent, an assessment and an accountability tool that is highly valued. The Auditor-General made an assessment last year – there were repeated criticisms from the Auditor-General – in terms of the lack of transparency and poor financial accountability of this government.

Let us note Mr Andrews had been in for many years but for all of the time that he was in this Parliament his understudy was doing her apprenticeship, and now she holds the reins as the trajectory goes over the cliff into the abyss of mismanagement. What did the Auditor-General talk about in that 2024 report? He commented that 61 per cent of performance measures from the Department of Treasury and Finance could not be verified – performance measures sent out to the public and available could not be verified – and 76 per cent of Department of Treasury and Finance’s calculations had documentation issues. So what is being presented is not fair or accurate, and most departments failed to meet their reporting standards under the resource framework.

We know, as we have heard, that debt is growing every day. The next part of the bill that is before us, this oxymoron of a financial management legislation bill, looks at exempting declared bodies. This bill allows for the minister to exempt certain public bodies, like the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, from financial reporting obligations. It is not a topic that I deal with a lot, because it is overwhelmingly an issue of metropolitan Melbourne. The Premier had the temerity one day of saying how much it will

benefit regional Victorians because they will be able to hop on it and go to uni. Let us look at the proportionality of infrastructure spend. If we are looking at management of this state by the Allan government, let us look at that proportionality. Rural and regional Victorians make up 25 per cent of the population – considerably more of the landmass but 25 per cent of the population. The Parliamentary Budget Office has verified that in the last few years this government has been spending somewhere around 11 to 13 per cent of the infrastructure spend there, so there is a disproportionate variation in this government's concept of what fairness is. It is all going into metropolitan Melbourne, and it is all going into billions of dollars of overspend – again, financial management this is not. If we look at the Metro Tunnel or the North East Link, they are billions and billions – I have not got a recent update – over and above the cost of the proposed budgets.

The former Premier spoke about some of these Big Build issues and indeed the Suburban Rail Loop and said something along the lines of 'If you're building a kitchen, it costs what it costs. If you're building a kitchen, it costs.' But families who build kitchens have budgets. They must keep within that budget, and if not, they will pay the consequences themselves, extending their loan. This government is extending the loan to my grandchildren's children and our prosperity, wealth and service delivery, not only in metro Melbourne but in the regions. 'It costs what it costs' – that is where the current Premier got her training from, and this government is talking about fiscal management. It is hypocrisy in the extreme.

We have seen that this bill has removed the independent oversight by scrapping those Governor-issued warrants. We have seen that there have been key agencies exempt from financial reporting. We have seen silenced transparency in elections in this bill, and we have seen a careless, negligent, irresponsible and immoral government.

We heard before that they love talking about cuts. Let us look at some of the cuts that this government has made in relation to some of those core services that are very dear to my heart. We have got the emergency services tax, one of those new and increased taxes that we have seen. We have seen a cut to the CFA budget, and I congratulate my colleague –

Jaclyn Symes: On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Bath is misleading the house by referring to cuts that have not been made to the CFA. If she wants to refer to history and look at the coalition cuts to the CFA, perhaps it would be accurate, but she is misleading the house. It is an inaccurate statement.

Melina BATH: Further to the point of order, Acting President, that has no relation to this debate, and the Leader of the Government was out of order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I am sure the minister will be happy to correct the record during her contribution.

Melina BATH: The government in this bill in clause 7 is looking at language like 'departments should operate within their budget'. We heard from the newly minted Chief Commissioner of Police that he has been told by the government to operate within the budget, although and otherwise we see the fact that our Victorian police system is under so much strain, so much pressure, and it is bleeding out onto our streets and into our communities. What this government is doing –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Melina BATH: Clearly I have touched a nerve of the Leader of the Government, which I actually feel quite exercised by.

What this government fails to do is provide transparency about keeping within its budget. We had the Shadow Minister for Emergency Services putting the question to the Minister for Emergency Services in the other house about giving us the value – providing to this house and providing to the Victorian public the budgets for the CFA, for FRV, for VICSES and for 000 – on a number of occasions over the last few weeks, and the minister will not provide it.

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Melina BATH: I like the fact that the Leader of the Government – and the Treasurer, while we are at it – is getting quite activated by my contribution.

The other thing that I want to just relate to this financial quote unquote oxymoron of a bill is the discussion around keeping within their budget. I know Mr Davis related this, and I think it is important to put it on record. I know the former Leader of the Nationals and former minister in the previous government Peter Walsh spoke about the importance of keeping to a gross state product (GSP) budget cap of 6 per cent, and Treasury were very, very nervous about that when there was a Liberal and National government between 2010 and 2014.

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Melina BATH: Minister, you will get to have your say in a moment, and we will all enjoy listening to your defence.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Through the Chair, please.

Melina BATH: But now it has evolved; it has somehow blown out. It has evolved into a budget blowout of 25 to somewhere around 28 per cent of GSP. That is a frightening amount as well, and indeed this government does not know the name of fiscal responsibility. The other thing that we have seen over this period of time is that there is this bucket of money which is fast disappearing and yet this government has shut down industry and in some circumstances has actually said there is no money – not ‘It costs what it costs’ but ‘There is no money.’ There are industries like the native timber industry and like the people who have been put out of work having done a great job of providing fibre for this state for its prosperity – to be able to do that. Yet sometimes it does not cost what it costs; it only costs what we are going to give, whether or not that is sufficient recompense and compensation for these good people. These people deserve our thanks and these people also deserve to be recognised, because their mental health has been shredded over the last decade from this government.

I have not gone into the other areas where this government has not been able to keep to budget. The other thing that I will just relate is the misuse of the Treasurer’s advance. It is supposed to be for emergency, urgent situations. In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the other day we had the Minister for Environment actually go in and speak in terms of bushfire mitigation, bushfire preparedness, Forest Fire Management Victoria and the work that needs to be done. We have a known quantity of forest and it is a known event and activity, and yet Minister Dimopoulos said, ‘The budget in this is lumpy.’ Well, I do not consider that to be good governance, I do not consider it to be good fiscal management, and I will not be supporting this bill.

Tom McIntosh (Eastern Victoria) (17:02): It is very interesting, isn’t it, when people want to paint history in their own version and their own light? It is very interesting. This bill modernises, brings up to date, the Financial Management Act 1994. Anyone living in regional Victoria – indeed anywhere in Victoria – in 1994 knew exactly what a Liberal government meant to them: it meant a cut to local services, and it meant train lines being ripped out, whether that be Bairnsdale, Leongatha, Ararat, Maryborough, right around the state. We knew that the banks followed suit. They pulled out, and regional Victoria suffered. Indeed metropolitan Melbourne and all of Victoria suffered. Schools were closed and hospitals were closed. Victorians know that if a Liberal–National coalition had half a chance again there would be cuts to investment in housing, there would be cuts to health, there would be cuts to education, there would be cuts to transport and there would be cuts to jobs and their economic policies of driving down workers wages would be rolled out in their full force, whereas the Labor Party are investing in new homes, investing in the hospitals that our communities need, investing in schools, investing in public transport and ensuring that our nurses, our ambos, our teachers, our police – the workers that deliver the quality of life that every single Victorian wants – have not only the infrastructure but also the pay, wages and conditions to ensure they can deliver what Victorians need.

Unfortunately, I do not have the time to go into so many of the wild, outrageous comments that have been made by the other side, so I will not. But I have touched briefly just on a few points that Victorians are very aware of about the risks of a Liberal–National coalition opposition and what they mean to this state, and I am proud to support the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I will leave my comments there.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:04): I will just provide a few remarks in summing up on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and thank the members that have made contributions on the bill. I have had the opportunity to listen to many of the contributions, and I am concerned at the opposition's comments – a lot of their comments, actually. I am wondering whether it stems from the fact that they were a little bit fast out of the gate to oppose a bill before actually understanding what it is doing, because anyone that argues that this bill weakens transparency unfortunately does not know – or conveniently does not want to know – how government actually works. The contributions were just riddled with errors. I will try not to pick on people too much. I did offer some comments in relation to Ms Bath's contribution, so I will leave my comments there and maybe just pick up a few of the other corrections later in my contribution, because I want to really focus on what this bill is all about.

It is pretty straightforward. It is an important step in supporting the government's fiscal strategy. It is about responsible financial management. It makes changes that will improve accountability and transparency across the public sector and entities, removing outdated aspects of existing legislation and ultimately better reflecting the needs of an increasingly dynamic financial and economic environment. These are commonsense changes and, I can confirm, aligned with the views and reflections from ratings agencies. Many people have asked me about credit rating procedures and credit rating conversations. It is not my practice to go in depth into the conversations that I have had, but I can assure you that the changes in this bill were a topic of conversation because they reflect the views that the rating agencies have provided.

Moody's reflected on the importance of such reforms, for example, in their public report on the budget, saying that broader financial reforms aimed at improving fiscal transparency and accountability may also improve governance, strengthen financial oversight, support more responsive budgeting and enhance long-term fiscal planning. Unsurprisingly, these were commitments that I gave to strengthening our financial management system in discussions with the agencies during both my visit to New York and follow-up conversations that I have had here in Melbourne, and I was pleased that S&P have now reaffirmed Victoria's credit rating with a stable outlook – against the championing of a different result from those opposite, despite the fact that would be not a great outcome for Victoria. But it shows where their priorities lie.

The changes in the bill include making it crystal clear that the CEOs and CFOs across government have a responsibility to stick to their budgets and to proactively manage financial risks. I do not think there is a dispute in relation to that. The bill also requires departments to notify the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) when they are at risk of exceeding their approved budgets through an early warning system. This will allow government to better manage financial risks as they are identified, putting in place the intervention before these risks may manifest into more significant challenges. The bill also strengthens the financial management obligations associated with the creation or cessation of agencies to ensure accountability for these agencies is well defined.

There will be greater clarity on how to correctly establish new entities so that consistent and appropriate financial management requirements are applied to those entities. The amendments also create the settings for a more risk-based approach to financial management by enabling smaller agencies to be more agile while holding the larger ones to a higher benchmark, which is appropriate. It is disappointing that the opposition, as I said, have indicated they will not support the bill, even though it helps protect our credit rating and reflects previous coalition policy. This is a reckless position that the opposition are taking, and I honestly was quite surprised when I heard about it and put it down to opposing for opposition's sake.

I also do question opposition members and whether they actually know why they are opposing the bill. Listening to Dr Heath, for example, she described her concerns about removing the budget update until after elections. That is not what is happening here, and there was quite a conversation from Dr Heath about her concerns, about the fact that there would be no budget update pre election. We are actually reaffirming that that is an important step. That is something that the secretary of DTF is obliged to do, and we have reaffirmed that in this bill. So I do, again, have concerns about the understanding of the opposition about why they are opposing this bill. Perhaps it also is reflective of the fact that there was very limited interaction – this is not a reflection necessarily of people in this place, but there was limited interaction – with the opposition on this bill. They just basically decided very early on they were going to oppose it. That was in stark contrast to members of the crossbench, particularly the Greens, who took the opportunity to understand the bill and what it is doing and therefore could have constructive conversations. I think it is disappointing particularly from the Shadow Treasurer to not embark on a similar course of action.

The first element of the bill that there has been a little bit of talk about – and it is almost embarrassing that we are doing it now; other states have done it except for WA – is the removal of the antiquated cash accounting system of warrants. The original intent of warrants stems from the Victorian constitution in 1855, when the UK still provided funding to Victoria. We obviously have a much more modernised banking and IT system now and the requirement to provide annual reports demonstrating how funds are allocated, rendering warrants outdated and ineffective. I think others have reflected on former Treasurer Alan Stockdale's comments in 1994:

... given modern parliamentary and management practice, the warrant procedure is an anachronism ... and any suggestion that that procedure imposes accountability on the Parliament or, indeed, on anybody else in the executive government simply flies in the face of reality.

I do not think I have ever met Mr Stockdale, but I certainly agree with those statements. Fifteen years later a 2009 Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into Victoria's public finance practices unanimously recommended that the use of warrants be discontinued. I looked at the membership there. I did and do still have a lot of respect for Mr Rich-Phillips in relation to a lot of what he could contribute to the Parliament with his understanding of finances, and he was certainly of the view that warrants should be discontinued also. Here we are a further 16 years on. Again, I do feel as though we should have acted earlier, but for the Liberal Party in particular to be saying that they object to something that they have, frankly, been supporting for decades goes to my point that this is a case of 'Let's oppose for the sake of opposition.'

In relation to some further opposition that we have received to this bill to the requirement of the release of a budget update by 15 December in years where a pre-election budget update has just been released, I would just repeat: there will be a pre-election budget update, which is contrary to some of the contributions we have heard. In the debate on the bill in the other place the Shadow Treasurer suggested that when the Liberals last came to power in 2010 they had no problem managing the timeline and the reporting process. But my advice is that that was somewhat challenging, given that the budget update that year was published six days after the legislated requirement due to the swearing in of the new government not happening until after the due date – and that also happened in 2022. Given how little time there is between finalising election results and the budget update's due date, there is no time for a newly sworn-in Treasurer to make meaningful changes. As a result, election year budget updates are largely re-released information from the pre-election update. Again, my immediate reaction to learning that the opposition were arguing to retain this provision was: 'They certainly don't think they're going to win the election, because why would they want to be in a position where they are potentially signing off the homework which will be mine?' It will be nothing. They will have no time to do anything, to change anything. Therefore really you are just requiring the department to duplicate processes that they have already done, which is frankly just inefficient and a waste of time.

There have been also members of the opposition who have reflected on the role of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and the important role that that office plays. I am again a little bemused why

they would be opposing a bill that VAGO would be very well placed to raise concerns with, if they had any, and I can confirm that VAGO have been consulted on this bill. They have expressed high-level comfort, and I will point that out next time the opposition want to rely on VAGO, seeing that they just pick and choose when to think it is appropriate to use the office for their political gain. They are an independent office. They would certainly be well placed to raise concerns if indeed they were warranted. They are not warranted.

Turning to the Greens amendments – and we will have a conversation in committee on these – I thank the crossbench for their engagement. I understand you will be moving some amendments – which have been canvassed by yourself previously, Mr Puglielli – and they relate to two main issues. The first amendment adds a requirement for the midyear financial report to include reporting on Treasurer’s advances approved in the first half of the financial year. We are happy to not oppose that amendment. It aligns with the bill’s intention. It also is consistent with my commitment, upon being appointed as Treasurer, for more transparency over Treasurer’s advances, which is reflected in this year’s budget. The Greens’ other amendment would also confirm that annual reports that go through a minister are to be transmitted to Parliament in a timely fashion. It will require annual reports to be transmitted to Parliament between 15 October and the earlier of four sitting days after the relevant minister receives a report, 14 calendar days or 31 October. I want to thank the Greens for engaging constructively not only in relation to this bill but on that amendment, because they had some ideas and they were happy to sit down and make sure that there were no unintended consequences for the policy objectives that they were trying to achieve. My advice from the Department of Treasury and Finance is that your amendments are consistent with the bill and will not cause any issues, and I would argue that they support your intention for enhanced transparency.

The bill delivers on the government’s commitment to strengthening the Financial Management Act 1994 to ensure it remains fit for purpose while allowing us to build on the solid foundations of the act and will support the government’s fiscal strategy to deliver surpluses and support economic growth. I would particularly like to take the opportunity to thank my colleague the Minister for Finance, Minister Pearson, who has joint coverage in relation to some of the requirements that are being amended today, and extend my gratitude to his office and to the Department of Treasury and Finance for their work on this bill. With that, I will commend it to the house.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (21): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Noes (13): Melina Bath, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Richard Welch

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

*Committee***Clauses 1 to 9 agreed to.****New clause 9A (17:24)**

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 9 –

‘9A Mid-year report

After section 25(2)(b) of the **Financial Management Act 1994** insert –

- “(ba) must include details of payments made during the period of 6 months ending on 31 December in the financial year out of money advanced to the Treasurer in an annual appropriation Act for that year to meet urgent claims;”.

Just to speak to this briefly, the amendment in question seeks to provide better reporting on the use of Treasurer’s advances. Currently under the Financial Management Act 1994 details of Treasurer’s advances I understand are included in the government’s audited annual financial report for a financial year currently required to be tabled on 15 October. The amendment inserts a requirement that details of Treasurer’s advances made are also included in the midyear financial report currently required to be tabled on 15 March of the current financial year. I understand that given the way that Treasurer’s advances are paid, which generally occurs at the end of the financial year, this means that the midyear reporting requirement will not capture all uses of Treasurer’s advances, but we are talking about a significant amount of spending here. According to the Centre for Public Integrity, \$13.7 billion was spent by Treasurer’s advance for 2023–24, equating to 14.7 per cent of the total amount appropriated to fund government services. So this amendment is an important step forward to promoting transparency on the government’s so-called secret credit card, but there is absolutely more work to do, and if it requires, for the purposes of improving political integrity, the use of these advances for that work to be proceeded with by the Greens, then we will continue to do so.

David DAVIS: I want to indicate to the chamber that we will support this amendment. We think it is an important amendment. We think there is a significant need for tighter reporting on Treasurer’s advances. It has been a shambles in fact, really, and I am not pointing at the Treasurer with that. It is a longer term challenge that has been there. But frankly, the last Treasurer allowed this to get way out of control, and so I welcome the Treasurer’s commitment to at least look at these and look at ways forward. I think what has been brought by Mr Puglielli is an important improvement. I note his point that it does not solve all of the issues, but there is no reason why, as a routine matter, Treasurer’s advances cannot be brought forward in the midyear document.

I should say that this is part of a broader examination. I know the Shadow Treasurer has certainly been involved in looking at these issues of Treasurer’s advances, as has the Centre for Public Integrity. I just want to put on record the work that they have done, and I think it has been an important contribution to the public debate. I note Mr Limbrick hosted them in the Parliament some months ago, and that was a welcome discussion on a lot of these matters. But it is clear that there need to be better accounting and better transparency on Treasurer’s advances. We all understand the generic requirement for them. Obviously there are floods and there is fire and there are unexpected events, and there is a legitimate role for Treasurer’s advances in those. But as I said when the budget was in the chamber, when in the discussion I went through the schedules at the back of the budget document, you can see the spread of Treasurer’s advances which are not truly matters for which there should have been a Treasurer’s advance. It was clear that most of this expenditure was not of that nature. Again, this is not a criticism of the current Treasurer. It predates her, and those figures in the budget more recently related to the earlier period. It was 2023–24, so it was a little while ago. But this will improve the arrangements, improve the reporting. To that extent, we will be wholeheartedly supporting it and encouraging further reforms as we go forward.

Jaclyn SYMES: The government too will be supporting the Greens' amendment. Like Mr Davis has indicated, this will go some way to, again, furthering transparency in relation to Treasurer's advances. It is something I have supported and committed myself to continual improvement on, I guess. This year's budget did separate out the TAs in relation to urgent expenditure but also tried to explain the milestone and contingency releases, which are also via a Treasurer's advance. I am always happy to have a conversation on this, because it has been, I think, a little lost that there are two purposes of Treasurer's advances in terms of holding money centrally from agencies and releasing it as milestones are hit. That is a financially responsible thing to do. Having it held centrally keeps a greater sense of accountability. It has more eyes on the amounts rather than having to potentially claw something back when it has been released to an agency.

I think there is a need for a conversation. Everyone gets the urgent stuff – fire, floods. I think that is fine; I do not think that is the issue. I would like to have further conversations outside of this bill in relation to those milestone contingency releases, because it is something that I have had the opportunity to have lots of conversations with the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) about and understand why it is done like that. I think I should make sure that I am availing others, perhaps, of the information that I hold, because I think there will be some greater comfort once that is explained in greater detail. But nonetheless this is about more regular reporting of TAs, something that I am comfortable with. Thank you, Mr Puglielli, for your engagement on this amendment.

New clause agreed to; clauses 10 to 18 agreed to.

New clause 18A (17:31)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

2. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 18 –

'18A Tabling requirements

- (1) For section 46(1) of the **Financial Management Act 1994** substitute –

“(1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), the relevant Minister of a department or public body must cause the report of operations and audited financial statements of the department or public body for a financial year to be transmitted to each House of the Parliament on or after the next following 15 October and before the earlier of –

- (a) the end of the next following fourth month of the financial year; or
- (b) either –
 - (i) the expiration of the fourth sitting day of that House after the report is received by the relevant Minister; or
 - (ii) if the first sitting day of a House of the Parliament after the report is received by the relevant Minister is more than 14 days after the date of receipt of the report, the expiration of the fourteenth day after the report is received by the relevant Minister.

(1A) On transmitting a report under subsection (1), the relevant Minister must report to each House of Parliament the date of receipt by the relevant Minister of the report.

(1B) The relevant Minister must not direct a department or public body to submit its report of operations and audited financial statements to the relevant Minister on a particular date.”.

- (2) In section 46(2)(b) of the Principal Act, for “laid before each House of the Parliament within 14 sitting days of that House after the request.” **substitute** “transmitted to each House of the Parliament on or before –

- (i) the expiration of the fourth sitting day of that House after the request; or
- (ii) if the first sitting day of a House of the Parliament after the request is more than 14 days after the request, the expiration of the fourteenth day after that request.”.

- (3) After section 46(3) of the Principal Act **insert** –
- “(3A) The clerk of each House of the Parliament must cause a report transmitted under subsection (1) or (2) to be laid before the House on the day on which it is received or on the next sitting day of the House.
 - (3B) If the relevant Minister proposes to transmit a report to the Parliament on a day on which neither House of the Parliament is sitting, the relevant Minister must –
 - (a) give at least one business day’s notice of the relevant Minister’s intention to do so to the clerk of each House of the Parliament; and
 - (b) give the report to the clerk of each House on the day indicated in the notice.
 - (3C) The clerk of each House must –
 - (a) notify each member of the House of the receipt of a notice under subsection (3B)(a) on the same day that the clerk receives that notice; and
 - (b) give a copy of the report to each member of the House as soon as practicable after the report is received under subsection (3B)(b); and
 - (c) cause the report to be laid before the House on the next sitting day of the House.
 - (3D) A copy of a report that is given to the clerks under subsection (3B)(b) is taken to have been published by order, or under the authority, of the Houses of Parliament.
 - (3E) The publication of a document by the relevant Minister under subsection (3B)(b) is absolutely privileged and the provisions of sections 73 and 74 of the **Constitution Act 1975** and any other enactment or rule of law relating to the publication of the proceedings of the Parliament apply to and in relation to the publication of the document as if it were a document to which those sections applied and had been published by the Government Printer under the authority of the Parliament.”.
- (4) **Insert** the following note at the foot of section 46 –
- “**Note**
- Section 4 of the **Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978** sets out values that a Minister should demonstrate in the carrying out of the Minister’s public duties. These values include accountability.”.

I am just speaking to this particular amendment regarding tabling of annual reporting under the Financial Management Act. I believe this applies to some 230-odd departmental and agency reports. It proposes additional requirements that a report is tabled by the fourth sitting day from the date it is received by a minister or, if Parliament is not sitting in the next two weeks, is tabled out of session on a non-sitting day within 14 days of receipt. The reporting requirements also provide that a minister cannot direct a department or public body to send them their annual report on a certain date to ensure that ministers effectively are not gaming the system by colluding to try and receive all the agency and department annual reports from within their jurisdiction on the same day.

We have also included, just to note in the amendment, a timely note to ministers that they are required under the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act to display the value of accountability in their public duties. In so doing I am just noting that my colleagues and I believe that ministers displaying accountability is closely linked to the timely tabling of annual reports, while the practice of dump day, as it is so called now, represents a breach of this requirement. I also note that the value of accountability ultimately falls in the jurisdiction of, and so could be referred to, the new Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission.

David DAVIS: Like with the other amendment, I just want to put on record that the opposition will support this amendment. We understand there have often been significant lags between the time of reports coming forward to ministers and departments and being tabled in the Parliament. It is an unsatisfactory practice to have a massive dump in that way, as has often been seen in recent years, so to the extent that this prevents that, we think that is valuable. The 14-day requirement, as I said to Mr Puglielli, slightly worries me, just thinking as a minister you could well be overseas for three weeks

and you would actually be concertinaed, as it were. You might have a bad report from a department that you would want to understand and be on top of before it is released, and you would not be being unreasonable. I am trying to be logical and thoughtful on this.

Jaclyn Symes: As a former health minister.

David DAVIS: No, no. I have watched some of my colleagues and this and that.

Jaclyn Symes: But health would have the most reports, wouldn't they?

David DAVIS: The most reports – I think that is right – and cemetery trusts and this and that. But leaving that aside, the intent of this is correct, that as reports largely come through, they should be tabled in a timely way rather than being dumped en masse. So the essence of it is something that we strongly agree with and thereby will support.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is quite a delightful committee. I kind of have a similar view to Mr Davis. I am certainly happy to support this amendment and the intentions that you have put forward, Mr Puglielli. I feel slightly guilty because as Treasurer I do not actually have as many annual reports as some other ministers. When I was Attorney, this would have caused me a little more angst than it does as Treasurer, but I think, as you have indicated, no-one wants to sit on reports. You want to get them tabled. We think this reflects the intention of most ministerial offices. My ministerial officers, who have extensive experience in previous roles, are very comfortable with your amendment in a ministerial office workability sense, and the advice from DTF is that this is also workable. So in the interests of greater transparency and consistent with respect for the way you have conducted yourself in trying to work through improvements from your perspective, we do not stand in the way of this amendment.

David DAVIS: I will just make one further comment. I think there is perhaps one other unintended effect that is positive – that is, it is much less likely that a government will be able to hold back a large number of annual reports ahead of an election. We have seen that in recent times. This government has done this a bit with health reports and other reports – held them back until after the election. That is an unsatisfactory point with respect to transparency and so forth, so this will help with that.

New clause agreed to; clause 19 agreed to.

New clause 19A (17:37)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

3. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 19 –

'19A Annual reports of State-owned corporations and other bodies

- (1) After section 53A(4) of the **Financial Management Act 1994** insert –

“(4A) The relevant Minister must not direct the body to submit its annual report to the relevant Minister on a particular date.”.

- (2) For section 53A(5) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

“(5) Subject to subsections (6) and (7), the relevant Minister must cause the annual report to be transmitted to each House of the Parliament on or after the next following 15 October and before the earlier of –

- (a) the next following 31 October; or

- (b) either –

- (i) the expiration of the fourth sitting day of that House after the annual report is received by the relevant Minister; or

- (ii) if the first sitting day of a House of the Parliament after the annual report is received by the relevant Minister is more than 14 days after the date of receipt of the annual report, the expiration of the fourteenth day after the annual report is received by the relevant Minister.

- (5A) On transmitting a report under subsection (5), the relevant Minister must report to each House of Parliament the date of receipt by the relevant Minister of the report.”
- (3) In section 53A(6)(b) of the Principal Act, for “laid before each House of the Parliament within 14 sitting days of that House after the request.” **substitute** “transmitted to each House of the Parliament before –
- (i) the expiration of the fourth sitting day of that House after that request; or
 - (ii) if the first sitting day of a House of the Parliament after that request is more than 14 days after the date of the request, the expiration of the fourteenth day after that request.”
- (4) After section 53A(6) of the Principal Act **insert** –
- “(6A) The clerk of each House of the Parliament must cause a report transmitted under subsection (5) or (6) to be laid before the House on the day on which it is received or on the next sitting day of the House.
- (6B) If the relevant Minister proposes to transmit a report to the Parliament on a day on which neither House of the Parliament is sitting, the relevant Minister must –
- (a) give at least one business day’s notice of the relevant Minister’s intention to do so to the clerk of each House of the Parliament; and
 - (b) give the report to the clerk of each House on the day indicated in the notice.
- (6C) The clerk of each House must –
- (a) notify each member of the House of the receipt of a notice under subsection (6B)(a) on the same day that the clerk receives that notice; and
 - (b) give a copy of the report to each member of the House as soon as practicable after the report is received under subsection (6B)(b); and
 - (c) cause the report to be laid before the House on the next sitting day of the House.
- (6D) A copy of a report that is given to the clerks under subsection (6B)(b) is taken to have been published by order, or under the authority, of the Houses of Parliament.
- (6E) The publication of a document by the relevant Minister under subsection (6B)(b) is absolutely privileged and the provisions of sections 73 and 74 of the **Constitution Act 1975** and any other enactment or rule of law relating to the publication of the proceedings of the Parliament apply to and in relation to the publication of the document as if it were a document to which those sections applied and had been published by the Government Printer under the authority of the Parliament.”
- (7) **Insert** the following note at the foot of section 53A –
- “Note**
- Section 4 of the **Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978** sets out values that a Minister should demonstrate in the carrying out of the Minister’s public duties. These values include accountability.”’.

New clause agreed to; clauses 20 to 26 agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:38): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:38): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

Adjournment

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (17:39): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Western suburbs transport infrastructure

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:39): (1803) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and/or the Minister for Planning. In Melbourne's west families keep seeing glossy pre-election photos of Labor ministers in hard hats announcing projects that they desperately need, yet the ribbon cutting, the actual delivery, never seems to arrive. Across six flagship western suburbs projects, Labor has made at least 13 election cycle promises and repromises since 2014, but we keep getting pushed to the back of the line. In 2018 the government promised to electrify the Melton line under the *Western Rail Plan*. Since then it has been repromised in campaign after campaign. There is still no construction funding for full electrification, and we now hear talk of partial electrification, while full delivery drifts over into the 2040s.

Melbourne Airport rail has slid into a string of enabling works announcements, while the core link remains years away. Households in St Albans and Sydenham were told Sunshine would unlock capacity, and commuters through Sunbury were told that the airport link would ease the corridor, but instead, again, we have just been pushed along and delayed. Melton hospital was promised in 2018 then reannounced in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Contracts and financials were pushed back until late 2024 and major construction to 2025, and now opening is supposed to be in 2029, 11 years on from the first promise. In Werribee and Melton, families have been told over and over help is coming, but they are still waiting. Entire new suburbs – Thornhill Park, Mount Atkinson, Fraser Rise, Rockbank North, Deanside, Weir Views and Aintree – still report no buses, and where routes do exist they often only run every 30 minutes. In Wyndham, Point Cook, Werribee, Tarneit West and Truganina, growth has outrun services. The Commonwealth has committed funding for the Western Freeway and M80 links between Laverton and Melton, but delivery rests with the state and the project remains listed as 'in planning' because Victoria's business case and milestones are still pending. It is the same thing with the Calder. A state corridor through Niddrie and Sunbury remains among the most congested and outdated despite years and years of campaign references. It is the same thing with the outer metropolitan ring-road, and I could go on. The action that I seek is simply that this government act and get things done.

The PRESIDENT: Could I just check, Mrs Deeming, which minister that was for? The Minister for Transport Infrastructure, yes?

Moira DEEMING: Yes.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region multicultural communities

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:42): (1804) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Like all of Victoria, the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region is home to many different cultural communities. Many of our multicultural communities are made up of new migrants as well as their second- and third-generation descendants. The mix of different cultures provides for a unique and wholesome community in which members share art, cuisine, language and customs with one another. Such communities, too, can help to consolidate the appreciation of others, uniting them in community and in harmony. It is thanks to the

work of numerous cultural organisations that embrace and share other cultures which are facilitated. Many of these organisations, however, are not for profit and volunteer run; hence, for their work to continue, consistent funding is needed.

The new expression-of-interest program announced recently by the Allan Labor government will give different Chinese community organisations the necessary opportunity to obtain much-needed government funding and therefore expand and have their work supported. The North-Eastern Metropolitan Region is home to thousands of Chinese migrants and their descendants and will be sure to benefit from this latest incentive by the Allan Labor government. That being said, there are numerous other cultural communities in my electorate, including Greek, Italian, Persian and Chin communities, which could also benefit, and it is important that these communities do not also go without the necessary funding that they need. The action I seek is for the minister to provide insight and update me on how other cultural organisations in my electorate may obtain government funding in the future to help them strengthen and continue the work that they do in their communities.

Planning policy

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:43): (1805) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for an urgent review of GC252 with respect to climate considerations, as required by the Planning and Environment Act 1987. In 2024 this Parliament passed the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Act 2024, requiring planning authorities to consider climate change when preparing planning schemes or amendments.

In essence, this created a climate trigger in planning decisions and was a move we strongly supported. It came into effect on 26 March 2025. The provisions require that climate hazards such as flooding projections and higher urban summer temperatures are considered before planning scheme amendments are made – so too must be the effects of a planning decision on Victoria's ability to meet its emissions reduction targets. This is net zero, by the way, by 2045, and yet we have recently seen several planning scheme amendments gazetted by this government since 26 March that hardly acknowledge the immediacy of climate change or how they might increase the impact that climate hazards will have on local communities. Of note is that GC252, which covers the first 10 activity centres, contains almost no mention of climate considerations in its explanatory memorandum, let alone any clear indication that they have met the legislative requirements.

This is in contrast to drafts of the SRL East structure plans, which explicitly address climate resilience, suggesting that some parts of the planning department are aware of the new legislative obligations. Further, the renewable energy and storage targets act inserted a new section 12A into the Planning and Environment Act that allows for ministerial directions to be issued with respect to climate change; as yet, no ministerial directions have been issued under this section. Given the anticipated and significant growth in activity centres over the coming decades, ensuring that climate resilience and emissions reduction are embedded in planning from the outset is absolutely critical. It is unclear whether the failure to address this in GC252 was simply due to the rushed nature of the amendment, the proximity to 26 March – when the changes to the legislation came into effect – or was in fact deliberate. In any case, it would appear that GC252 has not met the legislative requirements of the act with respect to climate change.

This urgently needs to be remedied before developments commence. It is also essential that for the next 50 activity centres the same thing does not happen. Putting aside the legal requirements, as a government responsible for the wellbeing of residents there is simply a moral obligation to ensure that climate resilience is a key consideration in all planning decisions. People rightly expect to be able to live in communities that avoid, or at least are able to withstand, extreme weather events due to climate change. Good planning, not at the level of individual sites or buildings but whole precincts, is what makes this possible.

Period products

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:46): (1806) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Women, and it relates to cost-of-living and period poverty relief in Gippsland. The minister has recently announced a period poverty for Victoria initiative, and she spruiks access to free pads and tampons in vending machines across 20 different major venues and others. All of these venues are in Melbourne. The action I seek is for the minister to consider my Eastern Victoria electorate and deliver the service that is extended to metropolitan women. A search of the government's online map shows that only 5 per cent of these vending machines are located in Gippsland, and not one of them is east of Rosedale or on Phillip Island. Gippsland has approximately 20 per cent of Victoria's landmass, roughly the size of Switzerland, and only 5 per cent of the cost relief measures that the government is spruiking occur in this area – only 13 period poverty vending machines to provide a coverage, as I said, across 390 towns.

So why again is the Allan Labor government being so citycentric? Clearly we have got difficulties and cost-of-living issues. Gippsland's unemployment rate sits at 8 per cent, almost double that of the state's; Morwell's is a staggering 15.4 per cent, and youth unemployment in Gippsland is in double figures. If the government is serious about supporting people in vulnerable areas and at risk, then this should be more of a priority. Where are some of these venues for sanitary products? They are at the MCG, AAMI Park, John Cain Arena, Rod Laver Arena, Margaret Court, GMHBA arena et cetera. Most of the people who go to these sorts of venues will be able to afford them. Instead, the government – and I will give the government some suggestions; it could occur – could use Foodbank and community pantries, neighbourhood houses, Aboriginal corporations, the Orange Door, regional train stations and bus interchanges, bush nursing centres or community health centres. Minister, will you actually commit to doing something for disadvantaged women in my electorate?

Pick My Park

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:49): (1807) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, Minister Shing. It relates to the new Pick My Park program the minister has created, which will allow members of the community to contribute ideas to the development and improvement of new and existing local parks. The Southern Metropolitan Region will be hosting a large number of the new activity centres near many of our train stations, so we are expecting an increase in housing density over the coming years and decades. I know that many of my constituents will be pleased to hear, as the minister has already made clear, that new housing stock should be accommodated with new access to parks and green spaces or upgrades to existing parks. One of the most important things we can do when we are making changes to people's neighbourhoods is to listen to their feedback, take it seriously and act on it. This program came directly from the feedback from the consultations on the activity centres program, demonstrating the minister's commitment to listening to the members of the community and responding to their concerns. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me with more information about how this will positively impact my community of Southern Metro.

Creative industries

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:50): (1808) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action I seek is that more long-term investment be provided to our wonderful arts organisations in Victoria, which do such excellent, acclaimed work with never enough funding. I had a wonderful evening recently at the launch of the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra's 2026 season on behalf of my Greens colleagues, particularly Ellen Sandell MP, the Greens member for Melbourne. I would like to thank the whole MCO team and all of the amazing musicians for making it such a terrific event. The Melbourne Chamber Orchestra describe themselves as tiny yet very mighty, and it is quite clear given the scale of the ensemble in terms of the number of people involved, and yet the calibre of their performances is so top-notch, putting on over

50 performances each season. What an absolutely outstanding achievement, and power to you all in your upcoming season.

A shout-out I would like to also give is to La Mama, a fabulous home for theatre in our community that has been operating for over 50 years, but due to endless grant application processes and the loss of a significant funding stream, they are having to completely rethink how they are delivering theatre to our community. La Mama brings so much to Melbourne, yet they seem to have to fight every few years just to stay alive, and that should not be the case. They enrich our city so much and should be offered secure ongoing funding to allow them the space and the certainty to focus their attention on what they do best, which is facilitating raw, radical and relevant theatre to people in our state.

The arts are what make our community, Melbourne itself, the vibrant place it is, so we should properly fund them, not just through short grants but in the long term.

Vaccination services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:52): (1809) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health and concerns a vital service in Melbourne's west closing its door later this month following a funding dispute with the Allan Labor government. The action I seek is for the minister to intervene and restore funding for the women's and children's immunisation clinic at the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital in St Albans and to ensure that the drop-in vaccination service remains open to help protect our children from preventable disease. This dispute comes at a time when there are declining childhood vaccination rates under this government. We must explore every opportunity for children to be vaccinated. We must ensure that specialist immunisation services are open, not limited due to funding restraints. We must prioritise the health and wellbeing of our youngest Victorians.

This clinic, like many others, plays a vital role for local families in Melbourne's west to stay up to date with their vaccinations and is the only one in the community that offers a walk-in service. This level of accessibility is much appreciated and well utilised. Having these services makes managing the day-to-day duties of being a parent much easier.

I stand with my constituents and the local mothers in the community who have put out petitions to oppose this unnecessary cut by the Allan Labor government. The community has many thousands of parents who oppose this cut because it means their children will need to seek their routine vaccinations elsewhere in the local community, including busy GP clinics, which are not always ideal places for families and young ones to visit and where it can be hard to find suitable appointments.

These cuts to this vital service come at a time when the Brimbank local government area has needed the service. There have been reports of cases of measles outbreaks in the last year and a terrifying 146 cases of whooping cough, up from just eight reported the previous year. We need to spend money on preventing these diseases from spreading in the community and protecting our youngest Victorians. I urge the minister to listen to experts, local communities, local councils, health authorities, parents, families and my constituents, who are calling for her to ensure that this funding is made available and that the service is open beyond the month of August this year and to keep the walk-in vaccination clinic at Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital open for our community.

Working from home

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:55): (1810) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Industrial Relations. I seek an update on the Allan Labor government's 2026 plan to legislate the right to work from home at least two days a week, delivering savings, productivity gains and greater workforce participation, especially for women, carers and people with disability.

Greyhounds

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (17:55): (1811) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture and is in relation to the leashing requirements for non-racing pet greyhounds.

Currently in Victoria letting your greyhound play with other dogs in a dog park makes you a criminal. Under the Domestic Animals Act 1994, all greyhounds are required to remain on leash when in any public place; this includes in designated off-leash dog parks. The only places greyhounds can run freely is in council-declared greyhound-only sites, but just seven of these exist across the whole of Victoria. This is despite the fact that greyhounds are among the most placid, docile and non-confrontational dog breeds. International research consistently ranks greyhounds as one of the least aggressive breeds towards both humans and other dogs. They are known for being calm, gentle and highly sociable, particularly when properly rehabilitated and adopted into pet homes. There is no evidence at all to suggest that pet greyhounds pose any greater risk than other breeds in off-leash settings. In fact, many greyhound owners report that being unable to legally let their dogs run freely causes unnecessary stress and restricts the dog's ability to socialise and exercise, key factors in ensuring positive behaviour. These are not dangerous dogs. They are beloved companions, adopted in huge numbers following their exit from Victoria's cruel racing industry. The community should not be penalised for doing the right thing and giving these animals a second chance at life. Across the border in New South Wales and in the ACT all greyhounds can run freely. Section 5 of the Domestic Animals Act allows for the government to create exemptions from certain provisions. It was by using this power that the government exempted non-racing greyhounds from the requirement to be muzzled at all times, back in 2019, and so the action I seek is for the minister to once again use section 5 of the act to gazette an exemption to allow non-racing greyhounds to be off-leash in designated dog parks.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:57): (1812) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Some days ago the minister acknowledged that the value capture mechanism would not raise the \$12 billion forecast to fund the project and therefore other taxing sources would be required. Now, within the case put to Infrastructure Australia and their response to it, the connection between value capture and the justification of the project was absolute. There is a clear connection between what value the railway would raise for the community – its return on investment – and the ability to extract value capture from it. The two things are inextricably linked. The fact that you now admit that that cannot occur fundamentally changes or in fact implodes the business case for the project. It raises two important questions, so the action I seek from you is: please advise the date on which you first became aware that value capture would not raise the money required and on what date you advised Infrastructure Australia of that, and what other advice you have given them, given that the business case has now changed.

Metro Tunnel

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:59): (1813) My adjournment matter tonight is directed to the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. The Metro Tunnel is the most significant change to Melbourne's rail network in decades, and importantly, it is ahead of schedule. The project will deliver faster, more frequent and more reliable services, benefiting passengers right across the network. It will also open up new possibilities and choices for how people move across the city, making journeys shorter, simpler and more comfortable. Four of the five brand new Metro Tunnel stations – State Library, Parkville, Arden and Town Hall – are in the Northern Metropolitan Region. These stations will give people faster and more direct access to jobs, hospitals, universities and key cultural destinations while easing congestion at some of our busiest transport interchanges.

This coming weekend marks another important milestone – a full weekend of trial operations. These tests will simulate real-world conditions across the tunnel, running trains through the new stations, testing systems and making sure everything from passenger information to platform safety is operating as it should be. Previous trials have been completed, helping to identify and fine-tune the small but critical details that make the difference between a good service and a world-class one. This is about making sure the very first passengers who step aboard have the same smooth, safe and efficient experience they can expect for many years to come. It is a testament to the effort and dedication of the

thousands of workers who have been part of this project, a true feat of engineering and collaboration. This government understands that investing in public transport is not just about moving people around; it is about building a better, more connected future for all Victorians. Increasing rail capacity will have a ripple effect, making the entire network more reliable, with much more frequent services, including on the Upfield line. From the students travelling from Coburg to the University of Melbourne, to the families from Craigieburn heading to the city for a day out, this tunnel will make a real difference to their daily lives. The action I seek tonight is for the minister to outline how the results of this weekend's trial will inform the next stages of the Metro Tunnel.

Community safety

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:01): (1814) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. It was announced recently that the government will provide 45 boxes at police stations for people to drop off their machetes. The stated cost of this is \$13 million, or around \$300,000 per box. Could the minister please provide a breakdown of the costings of these machete boxes?

Kingswood Golf Course site

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:02): (1815) My adjournment is to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that the minister join me in meeting with Kingston council and concerned residents facing the prospect of an inappropriate development at the Kingswood golf course site. The Liberals are strongly in favour of more housing development positioned in the right places and executed in the right way. The only thing that is blocking this goal is this Labor government. They are hell-bent on destroying our suburbs while heaping tax after tax onto developers and leaving the heavy lifting of infrastructure provision to councils. With this government, you will end up with overpriced dog boxes for homes. The other side might not like hearing that, but facts do not care about feelings. So today I would like to expose the utterly inappropriate development plans at the Kingswood golf course site. I am united with Dingley Village residents and recently spoke at a community rally alongside Cr Caroline White and Save Kingswood president Kevin Poulter. I am sponsoring a petition that opposes this development plan in its current form, and I look forward to presenting it soon.

Dingley Village, you were completely misled: you were told that there would be 800 lots, but if the Labor minister signs off on these plans, you could end up with 941 lots. In population terms, it is an increase of 25 per cent and more than 2500 additional residents, placing massive pressure on existing services and infrastructure. What is the plan to address this? None, actually. Labor has no plans for shops or medical centres, no employment opportunities, no public transport options and no additional schools or kindergartens in the plan. In fact residents will only have one main road and narrow streets, preventing easy access for the emergency services or waste collection trucks. Most ridiculously, many properties will be built on a flood plain and owners will struggle to get insurance. The flood plain controls are half-a-billion litres inadequate to deal with the building implications, yet hundreds of kilometres of drains will be dug up and pumping stations and aquifers will be trashed.

There were 8000 objections previously and Kingston council has opposed three plans over the last 13 years of applications. I have met with several councillors who note that council can meet its housing targets without this development. An independent golf course advisory committee was set up by this government, but how many of their recommendations were adopted – just one. The size of the units beggars belief. There are eight proposed units with a size of just 81 square metres – you could fit all eight units on an average Dingley Village block. Now the developer is seeking to exempt 300-or-less-square-metre lots from requiring a planning permit. How can we have confidence that these will be compliant without being independently checked by planners? Minister, for the sake of our community, heed our calls and change course on this looming disaster.

South-Eastern Metropolitan bus services

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:05): (1816) I love a bus, and what is better than a bus – multiple new buses. That is why I am so excited tonight to put my adjournment to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action that I seek is an update on the expansion of bus services in the Casey–Cardinia region which was just announced recently, which will be coming into effect from the 24 August, in just a couple of weeks time. As our outer suburbs continue to grow and expand, we are continuing to invest, and that includes in public transport with –

Nick McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: Mr McGowan, I want to be on a bus with you, and I want you to join me on route 831 as it leaves Berwick station, all the way down the new Bells Road to Clyde, stopping on the way past Kambrya, a great school, passing Wulerrp, a great new local school that we opened this year, all the way through Clyde North and to Clyde. And, Mr McGowan, when we get back up to Berwick, do you know what we can do then – we can jump on the newly extended route 928 bus from Berwick all the way through to Pakenham, stopping at the Casey Hospital, which we are currently expanding. We can go past – we actually drive over – the new bridge at Beaconsfield that we have recently built as part of the Beaconsfield level crossing removal project, the new McKenna Drive bridge. This new 928 bus will use it. We will then go and connect all these new residents who have moved into the south side of Beaconsfield and Officer over the past few years, who will have a new, highly reliable bus.

Mr McGowan, we will have a great day out together. Pack the sandwiches. We will get some coffees on the way at some of Berwick's fantastic local cafes. Do not worry about the sandwiches; we will find some there, because there are lots of great businesses that will be pleased to cater to us. And when we get there, we will be able to see the usage that has been driven, because with these new services we are providing not only an uplift in the expansion and the coverage but also an uplift in the frequency, with route 831 running every 20 minutes from early in the morning to late at night on weekdays. This is a significant improvement to that local service; indeed it will be connecting north to south in parallel to Clyde Road, unlocking a whole new north–south bus corridor through the south side of Berwick and through Clyde North and connecting with all of the east–west routes, including, Mr McGowan, route 798, which was extended just earlier this year and also has a 20-minute frequency heading in towards Cranbourne, providing that grid network across for the people of Clyde North.

Whether it is public transport or any of the other investments we are making, this is a very significant development, one that locals have spoken to me about extensively when I have been speaking to them in Clyde North. I am thrilled that the minister has delivered these new expanded bus services, and I ask for an update on how they will benefit my constituents as well as Mr McGowan.

Roadside grazing

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:08): (1817) My question to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety concerns a critical issue for drought-prone Victoria's farmers – the bureaucratic red tape strangling roadside grazing known as the long paddock. Minister, our farmers are the backbone of this state. During droughts they face unimaginable financial, physical and mental strain. Roadside grazing is a time-honoured lifeline providing free fodder when pastures fail. Grass grows on poorly maintained roadsides and goes to waste while livestock starve, yet councils, including Moyne shire in my electorate, are denying permits over absurd fears like cow manure splashing cyclists on quiet back roads. Posie Mann, a farmer in Moyne, was reported for grazing her starving cattle on roadside grass. She was told, 'It's too risky. Manure might cause an accident. A cyclist might get splattered.' On a sleepy single-lane road this is bureaucratic nonsense. What about the farmers rights, or what about the cattle's right to food?

The benefits of roadside grazing are clear. It addresses fodder shortages, and during drought, feed is incredibly expensive even if it is available, which it is not in many areas. As Posie has highlighted, she is rationing feed while her cattle continue to struggle, but she is trying to keep them alive – no help

from the government or the council. It also cuts fire risk by managing roadside vegetation. We know it lowers fuel loads and can reduce fire spread. Badly maintained roadsides become fire wicks.

Councils should recognise this and open grazing seasons to help prevent summer fires. Where invasive weeds dominate, grazing controls them; a problem becomes a solution. These are practical, proven outcomes rooted in tradition and backed by evidence, yet farmers face over-regulation and excessive caution. Moyne's reluctance to issue permits ignores low-traffic roads and farmers' desperate needs. Ecologists raised concerns about native vegetation, but this should be a consideration, not a roadblock. Safety issues like manure on roads are manageable with fencing, supervision and clean-up. Councils could set clear guidelines: electric fences, no night-time grazing and liability insurance. It is not rocket science, it is common sense. So, Minister, I urge you to act: form a cross-government taskforce to streamline roadside grazing policies, simplify permits, set clear safety standards, prioritise farmers' needs, cut the red tape and let common sense prevail. Our farmers deserve nothing less.

Kyneton train station

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:11): (1818) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action that I seek is for the minister to instruct VicTrack and V/Line to make land available to the Macedon Ranges Shire Council to build a shared path for pedestrians and cyclists from South Kyneton to the Kyneton train station. Kyneton is a lovely town in the Macedon Ranges shire, with history and heritage, river walks and the gorgeous botanic gardens. It is also a growing town, popular with those looking to enjoy a country lifestyle while also being on the train line and able to commute to Melbourne for work. In particular, South Kyneton is growing, with new housing developments popping up south of the Campaspe River. Council anticipates almost a thousand new dwellings in the development zones of South Kyneton. Unfortunately, there is not yet adequate transport infrastructure to support the residents in those growing suburbs. There is a lack of bus services, and the town needs a new road crossing over the Campaspe River at Edgcombe Street. My adjournment today, however, concerns the lack of safe routes for residents in the area who want to walk or cycle to the train station. There is at present no footpath, shared path or safe road crossing connecting the South Kyneton area to the station. Many consider getting to the station to be dangerous and a disaster waiting to happen. Locals are running an online petition calling for a 1.5-metre-wide footpath that will provide access to the station from South Kyneton, and it has gained hundreds of signatures. Others have suggested a 2.5-metre shared path that would service both pedestrians and cyclists would be better to service the region.

In its strategic *Kyneton Movement Network Plan (2024–2033)*, Macedon Ranges Shire Council states that developing cycling and walking routes to connect residents to the railway station is a high priority. Further, council has identified that as the population grows and V/Line patronage increases, this will put pressure on the available car parking spaces at the station. That makes bus, cycling and walking connections to the station even more important. South Kyneton is growing, and the Victorian government needs to act now to ensure that the built infrastructure that will enable active transport and connection is in place ahead of the future growth. A housing developer in the area joined the push for progress on this project, saying that the issue of a footpath has been unresolved for a decade. Part of the difficulty has been negotiating access to VicTrack land in order to build the footpath. A council officer has been reported as saying that council has appealed to VicTrack and V/Line to unlock the parcel of land for the proposed pedestrian path but without success. I am now calling on the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to take action on this matter and instruct VicTrack and V/Line to do everything possible to provide council with access to the land for a shared path, since it is crucial for providing connection to the station for the growing number of south Kyneton residents.

Taxation

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:14): (1819) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Premier. On the weekend the Premier let the cat out of the bag. They have got a big problem with some of their funding, they have got a big problem with the state budget, they have

got a big problem with the Suburban Rail Loop and they have got a big problem funding the so-called activity centres across the city. There are 60 of them. But what the Premier said on the weekend can only be interpreted as new taxes to fund these problems – up to five new taxes, car parking levies, levies on development and other levies in the SRL zone and in the so-called activity zones, these high-density high-rise zones. I listened to the Premier closely in the chamber in the lower house today, and what I heard only chilled me further. It left me with the concern that the government is actually intending on these new taxes. They have obviously got a massive budgetary problem. On the SRL the problem is well known. They have got \$11.5 billion-odd of state money. They have got \$2.2 billion of federal money. They say they will get the rest from the feds somehow. Then there is \$11.5 billion of so-called value capture. They are increasingly making it clear that with value capture it is going to be very difficult to get the kind of number that is needed.

But as I listened to the Premier it was clear that some of these high-rise high-density zones are also targets for these new taxes, and if we are going to see a list of new taxes, I think it is time the Premier came clean. The Premier needs to be honest with Victorians. They need to be very, very clear with Victorians about what the new taxes are, where they will be levied and which suburbs are going to pay the new taxes. In my area many of the activity centres are targets for these, and I look at the one around Stonnington, Monash and Glen Eira. I look at so-called Camberwell in the City of Boroondara and down around Moorabbin, but also some of the smaller centres: Kew, Auburn, Hawthorn and Glenferrie. These are targets for these new taxes and levies on properties. I think it is time the Premier came clean. Every Victorian who lives in one of these areas should know what new taxes are going to be levied on them and their families and indeed businesses too. But families who are the target of these new taxes, up to five new taxes, should know and they should know immediately. I am calling on the Premier to come clean, make a statement and explain to the community which taxes will be applied in which zones and how much they will have to pay.

Parentline

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:17): (1820) Here we go again, sadly – a walk down memory lane. In 2022 in this place, albeit the other chamber, Minister Brooks stepped in at the last moment to save Parentline. He did the right thing, but fast-forward three years and, as we have heard in this place today right across the parties, with the exception of the government, the government now intend to close the vital Parentline, which provides counselling by experts from 6 am to midnight. As we have heard in this chamber today during question time, no-one and nothing will replace that. For any children from five right up to 18 and their parents, importantly, those parents reach out because they need help. They need advice in respect to their children. It could be to do with antisocial behaviour. It might be to do with suicidal ideation. It might have something to do with claims or concerns about sexual abuse. It could be concerns with regard to digital exclusion or screen addiction. It does not matter what problem is faced by the parent, the stark reality today is that on 1 October Parentline will close, and there is no explanation for that. There is no elaboration on the review that was ordered back in 2022, which in fact had the government at the time do a complete reversal of its policy. Here we are three years later going down the same mistaken pathway.

But worse than that, there is no plan to put any other service in its place. What we were told in this place today was that we should call either the maternal health line, which is specifically for zero- to five-year-olds and is not for five- to 18-year-olds, or other services like Lifeline, who are not experts in parental advice – we know that already – and neither is Beyond Blue, neither is Orange Door. And Orange Door is a service, let us remind the public, that operates from Monday to Friday. It is not available online, as this critical service is from 6 am to midnight every day of the week. It is a service –

David Davis interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: It is a mean cut, Mr Davis; I will take you up on that. It is a service that actually costs very little – \$1.3 million – to operate, and in addition to that it services 17,800 telephone calls from concerned and worried parents. When we are having a very fine and appropriate, urgently needed

focus on child care in this state, it is precisely the wrong time to be making these kinds of cuts to critical services for parents. So I ask the minister: Minister, please urgently review this decision before the expected cut to this service on 1 October and save Parentline. For the second time, we implore you, as do many in our community.

Ballyrogan wind farm

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (18:21): (1821) My adjournment matter is a very concerning one for the Minister for Planning. I raise an issue regarding a planned wind farm at Ballyrogan and Tatyoon. I raise it on behalf of the Ballyrogan & Tatyoon Community Alliance, which is a community group. A number of people involved in this are advocating to different levels of government. They have raised concerns about a proposed 149 wind turbine development on 14,000 hectares of prime agricultural, cropping and grazing land south of Ararat. This is on top of the emergency services tax which these people are already dealing with. It is on top of the VicGrid legislation. It is on top of a drought. I do not understand why the government cannot see the plight of the farmers and the people in these rural communities, I do not understand why the government continues to ignore what is right in front of them and I really do not understand why the people who are supposed to represent these communities, such as the member for Ripon, will not go in and even talk to them. She is refusing to advocate on behalf of her community, the very people she is supposed to represent in this house of Parliament.

Community members are telling me that the consultation process has been awful. Squadron Energy, which is the proponent of this proposal, has a lot to answer for. A community consultation committee was meant to be established with a number of different aspects to it, including an independent chair. That has never happened, let alone all the other concerns that local community members have, including environmental damage. Many farmers have put in various aspects of environmental care on their land, which are set to be bulldozed through with a development like this taking place. I do not want to ignore the mental health impact this is having. Combined with all the other things that are going on with farmers, now they have got to fight a proposed wind farm that is in front of them. How is that fair? It is a kick in the guts. The action I seek is for the minister to immediately review the proposed Tatyoon wind farm; ensure locals actually have a reasonable, fair and genuine voice throughout this process; and ensure that process is enforced so that consultation can actually happen, rather than it just being a tick-a-box exercise. Farmers deserve better. We on this side of the chamber will never apologise for standing up for farmers.

Energy policy

Gaelle Broad (Northern Victoria) (18:23): (1822) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources to outline what additional support the government will provide to residents in 10 regional communities who are about to lose their gas supply to ensure they are not left out of pocket. The majority of these towns – Heathcote, Kerang, Maldon, Marong, Nathalia, Robinvale and Swan Hill – are in the Northern Victoria electorate. Solstice Energy has announced it will cease supplying gas to homes and businesses in these towns by the end of 2026, forcing 1150 households and 34 businesses to switch to electricity or LPG for heating, hot water and cooking – basic essentials for living. In 2015 the Labor government confirmed that the Energy for the Regions program would proceed and they would deliver natural gas to Victoria's regions. In 2019 the BIG4 holiday park and lifestyle village in Marong was offered \$5000 as an incentive payment to connect natural gas to its 43-unit development. They signed up and changed their toilet block as well as 24 units, with several in progress to change. Now they are being told, under the same government, that this supply will be cut off and they need to change back to LPG.

I have spoken with local residents who were shocked to hear about it through the media. Neither Solstice nor the government have been up-front with residents, deciding to cut the 20-year contract halfway, 10 years early. In Marong, Solstice connected new customers in November last year and one this year who were charged a \$2400 connection fee without any forewarning that this supply was about

to be cut off. Even with government rebates, residents are concerned they will be left thousands of dollars out of pocket and ineligible for these rebates due to income thresholds or prior use of similar programs. Families are already doing it tough with rising power bills and a cost-of-living crisis; now they are being forced to spend thousands to replace their appliances just to stay warm or cook dinner. For some, to change to electric is costly; it would also require switchboard upgrades and new line connections, not just new appliances. One household estimated it would cost \$28,000 to fully convert to electric appliances.

Elderly residents, self-funded retirees and families with newborns and young children are amongst the many residents stressed about escalating price rises and having their gas supply cut off within the year. Many residents simply do not have the money to cover the additional costs associated with changing or the capacity to navigate information online and coordinate trades and new appliances. They are concerned that they will be left severely out of pocket and fear the vulnerable in the community will be contacted by dodgy service providers offering assistance. I have spoken with residents who have said that going electric is not an option, and some homes have no space for an LPG bottle. The Allan Labor government's anti-gas agenda has created uncertainty for energy providers and is ultimately hurting our regional communities. What additional support will the government provide to ensure these businesses and residents are supported and not left out of pocket?

Responses

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (18:26): I thank those that contributed to the adjournment debate tonight. There were 20 adjournment matters, which will be referred to the appropriate ministers.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:27 pm.