



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Friday 28 August 2026**



# 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

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)

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 <sup>1</sup>          | 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 <sup>2</sup>         | Western Metropolitan       | FFV    | Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup>    | Northern Metropolitan      | Greens |
| Erdogan, Enver                      | Northern Metropolitan      | ALP    | Shing, Harriet                   | Eastern Victoria           | ALP    |
| Ermacora, Jacinta                   | Western Victoria           | ALP    | Somyurek, Adem <sup>6</sup>      | 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 <sup>3</sup> | 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 <sup>8</sup> | Northern Victoria          | ON     |
| Limbrick, David <sup>4</sup>        | South-Eastern Metropolitan | LP     | Watt, Sheena                     | Northern Metropolitan      | ALP    |
| Lovell, Wendy                       | Northern Victoria          | Lib    | Welch, Richard <sup>7</sup>      | North-Eastern Metropolitan | Lib    |

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 Dec 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;

IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;

Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;

Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 Nov 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 Jul 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 Nov 2024

<sup>6</sup> DLP until 25 Mar 2024

<sup>7</sup> Appointed 7 Feb 2024

<sup>8</sup> PHON until 3 Aug 2026

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;  
 FFV – Family First Victoria; 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; ON – One Nation Victoria;  
 PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Friday 28 August 2026**

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

*Announcements***Nepal and Tibet floods**

**The PRESIDENT (09:33):** On behalf of the chamber I wish to extend our condolences to the people of Nepal following the devastating flash floods and landslides. We send our deepest sympathies to everyone who has lost a loved one, those still waiting for news and the emergency services and volunteers tirelessly working in such incredibly difficult conditions.

**Photography in chamber**

**The PRESIDENT (09:33):** We will have a photographer in the galleries this afternoon taking action shots. I am exhausted from action shots; I do not know if I have got any action in me.

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Audit Act 1994 – Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, year ended 30 June 2026, under section 81(4) of the Act.

*Business of the house***Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

**Adjournment**

**Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (09:43):** I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 8 September 2026.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Valedictory statements**

**Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:43):** I move, by leave:

That the house interrupt business at 2 pm and Ms Tierney make a valedictory statement at that time.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements***Better Politics Foundation**

**Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:44):** Sixty per cent of respondents to this survey noted that their job has adversely affected their mental wellbeing, 40 per cent feel prevented from speaking out due to mental health concerns, 71 per cent rate their current workplace as the worst they have experienced and one in six have considered self-harm due to job pressures. Ninety per cent say far more is needed to support their mental health. 'Who are these statistics about?' I hear you ask. Politicians. As elected members we are well trained to be silent about the cumulative impacts being in public office take on our health and wellbeing, but these figures make it clear: Houston, we have a problem. That is why I am getting involved in the Better Politics Foundation. The Better Politics Study Australia 2026 is the largest study ever conducted on the mental health of Australian politicians,

drawing on the experience of 289 representatives across local, state and federal government. Why does this matter? Because the public deserves healthy, supported representatives making the decisions that shape everyday lives. We cannot make sound choices for Victorians if the environment we work in breaks the people that are doing the work. I commend the work of the Better Politics Foundation, and I look forward to partnering with them on this important issue.

### **Vets for Compassion**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:46): I would like to share a note that a constituent sent me last week about Vets for Compassion. She said:

A couple of Sundays ago, we had a kangaroo on our property who had broken her leg. After speaking with our local Wildlife organisation, they advised that we contact Vets for Compassion.

Vets for Compassion are a group of volunteer Vets and Vet nurses who attend wildlife emergencies across Victoria. They donate their expertise, time, equipment, supplies and transport to attend.

Our Vet and Vet nurse who attended that Sunday were able to sedate, assess and ultimately euthanise the kangaroo.

The literal compassion, kindness, professionalism and selflessness given by them was humbling.

After speaking with them, I was able to ascertain that funding for Vets for Compassion is nowhere near enough. Remember, these volunteers attend 24/7, 7 days a week, voluntarily.

As farmers, we were able to learn from them regarding the particular afflictions the kangaroo had aside from the broken limb. We were beyond grateful and in admiration of all they do and would respectfully ask for a review and greater funding contribution towards this voluntary service.

Under Labor, life is getting very hard for farmers. On behalf of our team I would like to sincerely thank the incredible volunteers from Vets for Compassion, who give of themselves and help the community in service to Victoria.

### **Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:48): I want to thank the VACCHO today for the great work that they do. It was a pleasure to meet with VACCHO representatives this week during the sitting and to hear about some of the great projects that they have been working very hard on, canvassing needs and coming up with practical solutions to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities across our state. VACCHO do amazing work, with their core purpose of strengthening and elevating the Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector, forming a statewide collective voice for the sector and shaping conversations on Aboriginal health and wellbeing whilst empowering members and advancing healthy, thriving and self-determined lives for all Aboriginal people. VACCHO have done such amazing work in really deeply consulting with community members and coming up with practical solutions that need implementation in order to keep making progress on Aboriginal health and wellbeing within this state. They have come up with very, very sensible initiatives: avoiding costly hospital care by focusing on preventative health through urgent care pathways; dental and oral health services; closing the gap on mental health and building regional and outer metropolitan Melbourne capacity; healthy transitions to support strong individuals, including transforming care in custody, which we know is in crisis; implementing the recommendations from the inquest into the death of Veronica Nelson; and ideas for legislative reform. I commend their work, and I urge all parties to closely look at this work.

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

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (09:49): In April 2023 I met with the mayors and chief executives of the south-west region of Victoria in Dunkeld, and they expressed to me that their priority was the shortage of child care in the region and the economic impacts that were happening. I am very happy to report today that the Portland Early Learning Victoria centre has been operating since February but was formally opened last month, and there are 103 places there. We announced a 103-place early learning centre at Warrnambool in partnership with Deakin University as well, and

that will bring back the bachelor of early childhood degree to the region. Also, in Hamilton in the same week I announced a 102-place early learning centre at Baimbridge College. This constitutes a comprehensive response by the Carroll government to the childcare needs of the south-west community. I want to thank Minister Blandthorn for being willing to listen to these ideas from South West TAFE, Deakin Uni, me and Warrnambool City Council on these issues, and we will be addressing both the shortage of skills and the shortage of child care.

### **Triple P positive parenting program**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): Recently I had the great pleasure of meeting with the Triple P positive parenting program. Parenting is never easy, especially in today's world, but we all know that the quality of parenting directly impacts a child's mental health, their wellbeing and their future. That is where Triple P comes in. This critical organisation provides parents with practical strategies to help build strong, healthy relationships with their children, confidently respond to their children's emotions and behaviours and establish routines and expectations to prevent problems from developing. Their work is backed by 40 years of ongoing local and international research. So far over 700,000 parents and carers across Australia and over 150,000 Victorians have used the Triple P online programs. With levels of neurodivergence among children rising rapidly – we see this in our schools – the work that Triple P does could not be more important. I commend them for the upcoming rollout of their new program, Thriving Kids, which has been developed specifically for parents and carers of children with disabilities and developmental delays.

### **Youth crime**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Recently I had the pleasure of taking Jess Wilson to meet community leaders from the South Sudanese and African communities in my electorate. Alarming, a young leader informed me that year 11 and 12 high school students are being trained by criminals to recruit teenagers from years 7 and 8 to commit crimes. These communities are over-represented in prisons and the Labor government's Crimes Amendment (Recruitment of Children for Criminal Activity) – *(Time expired)*

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:53): In my members statement today I want to give a huge shout-out to all of the communities in the Northern Victoria Region who have banded together to support each other in times of hardship. Whether it be fires, floods or the bulldozer that is the Labor government's insane net zero push, these communities have stood together and supported each other. I take inspiration from them and will continue to stand alongside them and fight for what is right for the Northern Victoria Region.

### **Joseph Monitto**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): I am pleased to congratulate Joseph Monitto, who recently completed the Victorian parliamentary internship program. This highly competitive program is coordinated by the Victorian Parliament's Department of Parliamentary Services together with Monash University and Melbourne University and is offered to a select number of students each year.

During his internship I had the pleasure of working with Joseph as I commissioned him to produce a report examining the extent to which language barriers are limiting access to Victorian government services for non-English-speaking culturally and linguistically diverse communities and analyse the consequences of these barriers. Joseph approached this complex and multifaceted policy issue with maturity and intellectual curiosity, which has resulted in a report of genuine value. It demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of public policy development, a clear analytical framework and an ability to consolidate diverse sources into a coherent and persuasive piece of research. The quality of his analysis and the clarity of his recommendations reflect a level of insight with genuine potential to inform real policy discussions. Under the guidance of his academic supervisor and me, Joseph

designed and carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across the multicultural sector. Joseph successfully created an environment in which interviewees felt comfortable sharing their professional insights and personal lived experiences, enriching the depth and credibility of his findings.

Throughout the internship Joseph demonstrated excellent time management, organisational and independent research capability, particularly while balancing other demanding academic and personal commitments. Joseph proved himself to be a capable, highly motivated and conscientious intern and would be an asset to any organisation seeking a diligent, thoughtful and analytically strong contributor. I commend this report to members to read and wish Joseph all the best with future endeavours.

### **Commerce Ballarat Business Excellence Awards**

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (09:55): Last night the Federation University Commerce Ballarat Business Excellence Awards were held at the Mercure convention centre in Main Road in Ballarat, and I want to extend my sincere congratulations to the business of the year winner, which was Springhill Farm. Springhill Farm have been operating in Ballarat for 35 years, and they are a proud local family business. Their snacks are in all supermarkets across the country, actually. They are in many of the aeroplanes that we get on, and you will even see them when you go and donate blood. Congratulations to all the award recipients last night and to the nominees in all the different categories. I also want to particularly pay tribute to and congratulate Jodie Gillett OAM, who is the CEO of Commerce Ballarat, who has always backed local businesses. Jodie and her team do an amazing job making the business awards one of the must-be-at events on the Ballarat calendar. I have been proud to work with Jodie for a period of time, because we on this side of the chamber always back small businesses, and I have been really proud to partner with Jodie in a number of instances to back business.

### **Pill testing**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:56): I rise to mark one year of Victoria's pill-testing service. Pill testing reduces harm and saves lives. We know that no drug is safe, but with the rise in drug-related emergency department admissions and overdose deaths in Victoria, it is our job to reduce harm and save those lives. Pill testing is doing exactly that. Since launching last August, the fixed-site and mobile pill-testing services combined have tested over 5000 drug samples from around Victoria at music festivals, events and the fixed site in Fitzroy. They have held more than 2500 conversations between service users and experienced harm reduction workers, where 40 per cent of people discuss their substance use with a health professional for the first time. Around 12 per cent of the tested samples contained unexpected psychoactive substances with the potential to cause serious harm. But with this service 28 drug notifications were issued warning the community about dangerous substances. The service has also provided 700 units of naloxone, the life-saving overdose reversal medication, which is also being rolled out for free by way of naloxone dispensing machines, thanks to the Labor government. Pill testing and medication like naloxone do not make drug use safe, but the evidence shows that they help people to make safer and more informed choices and help reduce harm. Pill testing is doing its job.

### **Greek Orthodox Church of Keilor**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): It was wonderful to attend the Panagia Soumela Greek Orthodox Church in Keilor East for their parish festival. Thank you to Father Jordan Krikelis for the warm invitation and Bishop Evmenios for his presence and leadership. It was great to be joined at this event by the wonderful Liberal candidate for Niddrie Samantha Byrne, the fantastic Liberal candidate for Essendon Tommy Le Deux and the amazing Liberal candidate for Sydenham Nathalie Moussi.

**Northcote festival**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): I was also celebrating last weekend at the Northcote annual festival. I would like to thank Father Phillip Papagiannopoulos and the Cathedral of Our Lady 'Axion Estin' for hosting this amazing event in the presence of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios, His Grace Bishop Kyriakos and His Grace Bishop Evmenios with our fantastic candidate for Ashwood Theo Zographos and candidate for Sydenham Nathalie Moussi.

**AusLanka TV**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:59): It was great to join my Liberal colleague Ann-Marie Hermans and also Lee Tarlamis for the official launch of the AusLanka TV English language channel for the Sri Lankan diaspora here in Victoria in Clyde North last weekend. Congratulations to Chamila Godage and the entire team at AusLanka TV for the fantastic work they do for the Sri Lankan diaspora here in Victoria.

**Asian Business Association of Whitehorse**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): Last weekend it was an absolute pleasure to attend the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse business awards night at Crown. It was a magnificent event overseen by Bihong Wang and Richard Shi. They did a great job in highlighting the incredible business talent that we have across the North-Eastern Metro Region. Congratulations to all the award winners. It was great to see Jess Wilson give a keynote speech, and in a business environment they were very, very pleased to hear about tax cuts and that we would have a better business environment going forward. It was great to attend with our fantastic candidate for Glen Waverley Jacky Sun, who would be, if elected, the first mainland Chinese-born Australian to be in this Parliament, which I think would be an exceptional outcome, and also our candidate for Box Hill Sally Houget, who is also from a strong business background. I think that augurs well for the future.

**Suburban Rail Loop**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): In less happy news, in Glen Waverley Jacky Sun has been campaigning very hard on the problems with parking now that the Suburban Rail Loop has reneged on a promise to make a car park there to replace the car parks lost. Businesses are really suffering. It is not a small matter. The businesses have been living on the hope of this promise being fulfilled, and it was meant to have been fulfilled already. It has not been. It is absolutely appalling. I can tell you now, the business community will not forget or forgive this.

**Lovell's Shepparton Newsagency**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:01): I wish to make a statement that is a little bit personal. I wish to congratulate my brother and sister, who last week sold their family business to a new family who will be taking over Lovell's Shepparton Newsagency in Shepparton, the Patel family. My family have been in newsagencies for almost 60 years. My parents had a newsagency in Melbourne for eight years, and my brother, sister and parents have run that newsagency in Shepparton for almost 52 years, so nearly 60 years of service to the newsagency industry. In that time our family have seen many changes to newsagencies, from the days when everybody bought a daily paper – a printed version – to today when many people read the papers online and no longer visit their local newsagencies every day. It has been a pleasure for our family to service the Shepparton community and to make many, many friends from the customers who have come into the newsagency over the years. My brother intends to retire and play a lot of golf and also bowls – more so bowls than golf – and my sister has agreed to stay on with the new owners for a while to help them settle into the newsagency and because she is not quite of retirement age yet. I wish the Patel family the best of luck with the business, and I hope that it thrives with them.

*Business of the house***Standing orders**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:03): I move:

That:

- (1) all current temporary orders be rescinded on 1 December 2026;
- (2) the proposed changes to standing orders as set out in tables 2.1, 2.2 and 3.1 of the Procedure Committee's report on the standing orders review 2026 be adopted and the standing orders of the Legislative Council be amended accordingly, to take effect on 1 December 2026;
- (3) joint standing order 25 be rescinded effective from 1 December 2026 and a message sent to the Legislative Assembly seeking their agreement;
- (4) the resolution of continuing effect adopted on 30 April 2019 relating to the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser be rescinded effective from 1 December 2026 and a message sent to the Legislative Assembly seeking their agreement;
- (5) standing order 12.12 be omitted and replaced with the following new standing order to take effect on 1 December 2026:

**'12.12 Personal explanations**

- (1) Where there is no question before the Chair and with the consent of the President, a member may explain how they have been misrepresented or explain another matter of a personal nature.
- (2) A personal explanation must be brief, factual and not infringe Standing Order 12.18.
- (3) A member must provide their proposed personal explanation to the President in writing before consent may be granted.
- (4) Unless there are exceptional circumstances, a member must provide their proposed personal explanation to the President at least one hour before it is made in the House.
- (5) A personal explanation will not be debated.'; and
- (6) standing order 16.02(2) in table 2.1 of the Procedure Committee's report on the standing orders review 2026 be amended by inserting 'substantial' before 'intervening debate'.

This motion is in relation to standing orders and is a reflection of the work of the Procedure Committee. At the outset can I thank the Procedure Committee. The chair is the President and the deputy chair is the Deputy President and we have Mr Davis, Mr Erdogan, Dr Mansfield, Mr Mulholland, Ms Terpstra and me. We had conversations about the operation of the standing orders that were very well facilitated by the Clerk Robert McDonald and other clerks in terms of Richard Willis. A big shout-out to Annemarie Burt, Juliana Duan and Tom Mills, assisted by Natalie Tyler.

I like to describe these meetings as being a little bit of therapy for the clerks, because this is an opportunity for them to identify issues with the procedures of the Parliament, and our chamber in particular. They are the experts in this. They are who we go to for advice when we want to know how certain rules work, and I thank them for that. The chamber would not function half as smoothly as it does without that wise counsel. It also means that they identify things that are perhaps not modern, need changing or maybe frustrate their workplace. This is their workplace, and they help us so much. So there is a little bit in here about updating things, making things more seamless and making things a little more sensible. It was a good process with the committee because there was a lot of consensus and a lot of common sense that was brought about in this report, which will hopefully be reflected in updated standing orders for the next Parliament.

In particular I just want to call out a couple of the amendments that I think are particularly sensible. They improve the efficiency of the chamber and reflect a bit of common practice that has evolved in the chamber. I particularly think that the standing order 14.10 change on the circulation of amendments will hopefully speed things up. We know that what often happens is that we end up waiting for

amendments to be signed off by the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and run through the papers office, which forms the very helpful run sheet that we know we cannot operate a committee stage without because we would all lose our way. But often we end up having to put additional speakers on at the second-reading stage to facilitate that process that we know is going to happen anyway. Then what happens is we end up in clause 1 for a significant amount of time. This amendment will allow the ability for amendments to be flagged and for the process to catch up in the committee stage. I think that is a sensible change that will work well because members are pretty open about what is coming et cetera. I think that will save us a lot of time. As we know, we have been doing long hours; we are doing four sitting days a week. Any opportunity to identify saved minutes I think is particularly valuable so that we can get through the important work of the house.

Also on saving minutes, I think Mr Galea is particularly interested in the change to standing order 16.02. Again, it is a slight reflection of what is happening in the chamber regularly, reducing 4-minute bells to 1-minute bells when we know that people are around, rather than having to wait for 4 minutes for a division. The proposal is basically to insert the word ‘substantial’ before ‘intervening debate’, which will just effectively reflect the chamber’s practice and avoid the groans when you have to go to the 4-minute bell sometimes. Again, it is just to build in some of that common sense.

The other one, which I think people know I have been working on for a while, is in relation to condolence motions. This is not a reflection of a lack of respect for anyone. I will put the rationale for this amendment back on myself. In this place it is great that we acknowledge anybody that has passed that has been in this place, and I think that is absolutely appropriate. Saying some nice words and reflecting on their achievements is absolutely appropriate. But the automatic hour’s adjournment for former ministers, presidents, leaders of parties et cetera I find unnecessary – not every time, but most times. I will say it in these terms: when I pass, future people of this chamber, it would be lovely if you say a few nice words, but I do not want you wasting an hour in your office after you have said those few words. I will be certainly opting out of an hour’s adjournment for the future people of this chamber when my passing comes, and I do not think my family will have an issue with that at all. What this amendment does is just take away the automatic hour’s suspension after a condolence motion, and it can be agreed between the house. Obviously, if somebody has a particular issue, it is not something that is going to be denied. I do not think it will be politicised. I just think that we know how important the business of the house is now. I want to make sure that in the future people have that option to just keep getting on with business after they have had their minute’s silence and the like. That is something that I have been carrying on about for a while. The fact that we have got a little bit of an option, hopefully, in the next standing orders is something that I certainly welcome.

Again, I thank the members. I have been on this committee, I think, every Parliament since I have been elected. President, thank you for your expert chairing. It was a very smooth and collaborative process, and I commend the motion to the house.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:10): I will just make a few short comments on the standing orders review of 2026. The Procedure Committee has, as it should do and has traditionally done, looked at the standing orders at the end of the Parliament, where the lessons from that session can be learned and minor changes can be agreed. These are largely agreed changes, I think I would describe them as – things that are unexceptionable, that are mild but actually not necessarily unhelpful and that actually make things a little smoother and a little faster. I do want to agree with the Leader of the Government in thanking the clerks for the work that they have done. A remarkable amount of work was put into this, thoughtfully working their way through the standing orders and proposing minor adjustments as we went. They have largely been accepted, and this report, in essence, is agreed.

There are one or two things where I would say there is some level of disagreement. One relates to the production of documents. There is in the opposition, and I think among some in the crossbench too, a lingering annoyance and anger at the government’s failure to produce documents in even a remotely timely way on a legendary scale. This is a legendary scale on which they have actually failed to

produce documents. So we do want to mark that. It is a matter of regret that we did not pursue the government more vigorously on this, in my humble view.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, there are a lot of reasons and matters on that, and it is not necessarily needed to put all those on the public record, but it is something that has weakened the chamber's scrutiny capacity, and that is unfortunate.

I also draw the attention of the chamber to the minority report, which just highlights a point of principle that the opposition – the Liberals and the Nationals – have regarding the treaty changes that were made to the standing orders recently. We will seek to reverse those with an amendment. We accept that others in the chamber have a different view, and we are respectful of that, but that is our view. In this circumstance I flagged at the Procedure Committee meeting that we would proceed to move that amendment. But equally, I was very concerned to make sure that that in no way is seen to reflect on the overall process, where across a broad front there is overwhelming agreement. With those comments, I will leave it to the others to contribute.

**The PRESIDENT:** Was that an amendment to this motion?

**David DAVIS:** Yes.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can we get that circulated, please?

**David DAVIS:** I did flag that at the meeting, President.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes, but I have not seen it. I want to see the amendment.

**David DAVIS:** It is in the report.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:13): I rise to speak briefly on this report. I would like to thank the President, fellow committee members, the clerks and other secretariat who provided support during this committee process. I think it was, as others have said, a very constructive and collaborative process. Obviously, there are a few points of disagreement, but I think, sensibly, any disagreements will be deferred to the next Parliament. It is appropriate that they decide the rules that they will be operating under.

Also, a number of changes were made that incorporate things that have perhaps been practiced by convention but are not necessarily clarified in the rules. One thing I would say is that the functioning of standing orders, and sessional orders for that matter, does depend on all members of this place buying into the agreement that we will uphold those and that we will see them as the rules under which we operate. This process we went through is really a process whereby we agree on the rules of the game in this place. I think, as Mr Davis alluded to, throughout this term one of the more egregious examples of the standing orders not being followed has been in relation to the production of documents. While I think we have potentially landed somewhere with part of that process, there is still one area where the government members have failed repeatedly to follow what are very clear rules within the standing orders, and that is with respect to executive privilege.

We have had this debate many times, and the government has every right to claim executive privilege. But if they do that, there are a number of steps under the standing orders that they are required to follow, and not once have they ever followed that process. The process is very clear. The mover of the motion is allowed to examine the documents. They make a decision on whether they think the claim of executive privilege is reasonable. If there is a dispute about whether they think that is reasonable, an independent arbiter is appointed to resolve that dispute. The arbiter may decide in the government's favour – that it is a legitimate claim of executive privilege. Alternatively they might decide that for some of those documents there is no claim of privilege that should be upheld and those documents should be released.

We see this happening all the time in New South Wales, and some really, really important public interest issues have been uncovered by the New South Wales Parliament as a result of this process. I highlight the work of my Greens colleagues in New South Wales, without whom many of the issues that have been uncovered around the scandals that have been occurring in the childcare sector would not have come to light. I mean, it was their work and their persistence in trying to get those documents released, and in their Parliament, as much as the government exercised its right to not have some of that information released, they went through the process, they followed the rules anyway, and documents were released. As much as maybe the government at the time in New South Wales did not like that information coming out, look at what the result has been. Yes, it has been awful to learn about it, but hopefully it has triggered a whole lot of really important reforms in the childcare sector, because there were terrible things, and there still are terrible things, going on in that space. We would not be there were it not for those documents being released. There is another process underway at the moment that is exposing some of the issues around food safety, labelling and product of origin that is really important, and I could go on.

There are a whole range of issues that are exposed through this process in the public interest that lead to better outcomes for the people we are meant to serve. So I would just implore the next Parliament to have a think about why we create these standing orders. They are only as good as the commitment we have to upholding them. I would implore the next Parliament to actually follow the rules. I hope we see an improvement in that space. Perhaps, depending on what the make-up in here is, views around that could change. I hope that is the case and that there will be a different attitude to the release of documents. Otherwise, I think this was a really good process. Sensible changes have been made, and hopefully it has created a great foundation for the next Parliament, whatever that might look like.

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, after receiving a copy of the amendment that Mr Davis circulated, I want to read that because in consideration of that amendment, my concern is that the amendment breaches standing order 7.06, which is the same question rule. The Council first dealt with the question around this issue on 2 April, when the chamber considered the government's motion to include the statement of treaty compatibility provisions in the standing orders. That was in April of this year, and the motion passed this chamber – and that there would be no change to that. Today is only four months later, so the tabling of this amendment now would offend that same question rule, because it is within the six-month timeframe. Just to fortify my remarks, I draw to your attention, President, the ruling from President Grimwade:

The basis of the same question rule is to ensure that there is some finality in a matter and that the time of the House will not be taken up in discussing an issue that has already been decided.

Therefore, with that in mind, I would seek your guidance, President, and ask that you consider ruling this amendment out of order.

**David Davis:** Further to the point of order, President, it is also important to consider the context. In this context there has been a Procedure Committee meeting that looked at the standing orders on a wide front, and there have been agreed proposals to change the standing orders – in fact everyone across the chamber agrees – and the standing orders will be different than the ones that are in operation now. In that context we have proposed to move an amendment which will allow changes to reverse some of the points that were made at the time but in the context of these new changes that have been made to the standing orders.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Further to the point of order, President, I can only point to the fact that there are rulings from the Chair in regard to these matters. I understand Mr Davis's submission around this, but the thing is that there are no significant changes that would actually go to what Mr Davis is talking about. Again, the circumstances are the same in the context that this matter was discussed. The Procedure Committee met, and there were opportunities for Mr Davis and the others on that committee at the time to discuss this and try and change it then. But the point is that there was a motion before this house and the house dealt with it, so this is a backdoor way of trying to undo what the chamber

had already decided, and that should not be countenanced. That is why this amendment should be ruled out of order, as it offends the standing orders.

**Evan Mulholland:** Just on the point of order, President, the motion that was put previously changed the standing orders in the positive to add in references to treaty. This is not the same motion. The same question rule deals with the exact same motion or question. This is an amendment that largely reverses those changes, and therefore it is in order. It is something that was flagged in the Procedure Committee and it is flagged in this report on standing orders, and therefore it is able to proceed.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will take all points of order, but in fairness to the chamber I just want to externalise my thoughts at this point. I count on my fingers, and I think it is within the six months. A question was put in a bill to insert –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** No. Show respect. I am externalising my thoughts, and I will give you a go to say if I am wrong. A question was put in a bill to insert these words into the standing orders as part of a bill. Within six months the proposal is to take out those words. My thinking is that a question was put; whether it is in the negative or the positive, it is the same question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** You can say no all you want, but my thinking at this point is it is the same question. If there has been a change of circumstances, then the six-month rule can be deemed not to apply. I will take points of order, bearing in mind that what I need to be convinced of is that there has been a change of circumstance.

**Sarah Mansfield:** Further to the point of order, President – and apologies if this is not a point of order – I am just wondering about the question of whether you can even amend standing orders to override a requirement under legislation. I would have thought the legislation trumps the standing orders, so I am just wondering whether this is even a valid amendment.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am still stuck on the principle that I outlined. The question was put, and there needs to be a change of circumstances to offend the same question rule.

**Sonja Terpstra:** On the point of order, President, I am giving strong consideration and looking at what the ruling of President Grimwade was at the time, and you are absolutely, 100 per cent correct. What the ruling does say is that the Chair may consider if new circumstances apply, so it is not an absolute situation where, even if there were new circumstances, the ruling could be avoided. The wording was ‘may consider if new circumstances apply’ in allowing the same question to be put. I would say that in Mr Davis’s motion and the amendment he has failed to outline any new circumstances that would trigger any discretion on your part that may be involved to consider any new circumstances. I would say that there has been no submission received in these proceedings in this debate today that should enliven that provision.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Ms Terpstra. Mr Davis, in consideration of this, whether you believe the circumstances have changed, I believe, is the point that we are probably getting at.

**David Davis:** The context of this report is important. This is laying out the standing orders for the next Parliament. We are entitled to lay out the new standing orders for the next Parliament, and this is our view about how the standing orders ought to be in the next Parliament. I did raise it at the Procedure Committee, as you well remember, and indeed I did make the point that I understood there would be different views in the chamber, and consequently –

**Sarah Mansfield:** It’s the law.

**David Davis:** Well, in which case the government did not need to move such an amendment in the first place to the standing orders. They are not required to move that amendment. They believed that

they should do that. Now, we have a different view. That is a separate point from what the President is asking. My point is there is a context here, and the context has changed. The context is different because we have a report from the Procedure Committee looking at the procedures for the next Parliament all the way through. This is an opportunity to do this right now for the next Parliament. The next Parliament of course can make further changes – there is nothing we can do to bind them – but this is a recommendation about the way we go forward with the next Parliament. That is the context, and that is the changed situation. It is quite a different situation from a single motion coming forward earlier. This is the contextual arrangement for the next Parliament.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am not convinced that a committee process is a change of circumstance as far as the same question rule goes.

**Michael Galea:** Further to the point of order, President, I was just going to say that Mr Davis, in his response, has given no explanation of any change of circumstance and that a committee report does not constitute a change of circumstance.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Michael Galea:** As much as you might like to try and spin things to your advantage, you have not in any way demonstrated how this is not a clear violation of the same question rule.

**Sonja Terpstra:** Further on the point of order, President – and I know we are kind of getting into a point-of-order-off – I think what is important is that in accordance with what you have been telling the chamber, I want to then turn to what Mr Davis has been saying. It is very clear, the ruling. What is the change in circumstances? What is different? Mr Davis talked about context. That is not a change in circumstance. I point to the fact, President, that every year and in every session of Parliament it is not an extraordinary thing for this chamber to consider its orders, sessional orders or standing orders. That is de rigueur for this chamber. That happens every time, so to try and say that somehow the Procedure Committee or the house reviewing its standing orders or sessional orders is unique does not have any force. It does not carry any force. And I still do not understand what Mr Davis points to in terms of context. He is saying that the Procedure Committee report represents that context, but the Procedure Committee has met a number of times. We also met in regard to the issue that both Mr Davis and Dr Mansfield talked about, which is production of documents, and we had information from New South Wales. The point I am making is to say that somehow the Procedure Committee meeting represents a change in circumstance is a fallacy. It carries no force. I draw everyone's attention back to the standing orders and say again that there is no change in circumstance that would necessarily warrant the amendment that Mr Davis has tabled being accepted and then trumping what the house has already decided within the six months.

**David Davis:** Further, to the point of order, President, aside from the argument that I have made about the contextual situation, the change in circumstance, this is an unusual circumstance. We are going towards the next Parliament.

*Members interjecting.*

**David Davis:** No, this only happens once every Parliament; that is right. In this case we have proposed amendments for the next Parliament. This is a signal to the next Parliament, and that is why we have done that with the minority report and made our points clear there. So it is quite a different circumstance. But further to that, there is also the question of binding the chamber and binding the committee from dealing with these matters and being able to report to the chamber as it sees fit. In this circumstance the committee has reported, and it is up to the chamber how it treats that. In that circumstance –

*Members interjecting.*

**David Davis:** No. I make a further point, a third point, and that is: I am aware of no ruling that says a parliamentary committee – in this case, the Procedure Committee – or members of that committee

cannot propose new ideas and changes of various types to the house. It would be wrong to bind such a committee. It would be wrong –

*Members interjecting.*

**David Davis:** No, but in the circumstances a structured, fulsome look at the standing orders has occurred, and that is the nature of the report. We have brought that report back to the Parliament. In this case there is also a minority report which makes a set of recommendations. It is not intended that the six-month rule stop that, and I am not aware of any situation where a proposed change to standing orders coming from a committee has been blocked from proceeding. That would be quite extraordinary; it would be very unusual. I am not aware of any ruling that you could draw on.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is a standing order – a six-month rule.

**David Davis:** Yes, President, but that does not necessarily deal with the fact that it is a committee report.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am happy to externalise my thoughts again, and I am happy for another round of points of order if people wish. A minority report to a committee is not a change of circumstance. A committee report is not a change of circumstance in terms of a question being put within the six-month period. So I will not put the amendment as a question. But as I said, in fairness to the chamber, if anyone else wants to, they can put a point of order in that regard.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, we intend to proceed with this matter. We think it would be an error, if I can be honest, for you to rule that out. It is a matter for the chamber. There has been a report put to the chamber making a recommendation, and that is a change of circumstance in and of itself.

**Sonja Terpstra:** President, further to the point of order, I think it is clear we have talked about the six-month rule, and I just want to refer to my previous remarks. This amendment seeks to undo the decision of this house within six months through a back door. The bottom line is that this amendment would also seek to bind a future make-up of this Parliament in the next session, and that cannot happen. If Mr Davis or anyone who is in this chamber in the new Parliament wants to do what Mr Davis is seeking to do, they can do it then. It is not a matter for this chamber to do that now and bind a future Parliament. If we look at the rulings and the standing orders that govern the way we operate in here, it is clear that Mr Davis has failed to elucidate what the change in circumstances is, because a committee report is something that committees do all the time. Minority reports are done all the time. There has been a failure to lay that down. Again, the six-month rule should not be undermined on the basis of a backdoor way of trying to undermine what this house has previously decided.

**Michael Galea:** Further to the point of order, President, Mr Davis has claimed that this is a recommendation of a committee. It is simply not; it is from a minority report. It was not put in the substantive report, and I do not even see an extract of proceedings that shows it was put to a vote in the committee. It is a blatant misrepresentation to say that this is a recommendation of a committee. It is not. Mr Davis is furiously spinning his wheels, sticking himself in the mud and trying to deflect from the fact that this is a clear and flagrant breach of the standing orders and the six-month rule.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am going to rule on it. I appreciate, Mr Davis, that you may think it may be in error, me ruling on your amendment. I appreciate that. I have said a few times during this term that I do not own the standing orders. We all do. I take into account points of order here about future parliaments. If for the six-month rule it can be determined that that is a change of circumstance because there has been, as Mr Galea pointed out, a minority report to a committee report, then I think that would be a very bad precedent to set for a future Parliament. I am not going to put Mr Davis's amendment to the motion. Does anyone else want to speak on the motion?

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:37): I will just point briefly to our minority report. Obviously I am quite disappointed that the amendment will not be put given that it was flagged

in the minority report. It is something that we have committed to doing should we have the fortune of being elected by the Victorian people. I am looking forward to that debate and to joining many people – some obviously will not be here, some will – in that debate in the Parliament.

I would like to start by thanking the clerks and the President, but particularly Robert McDonald, Richard Willis and Annemarie Burt and the other staff that went into this. They do an amazing job in finding quirks. It is something that we politicians, wrapped up in the wrangle of parliamentary debate, do not always think about – some of the speed bumps and parliamentary potholes that might get in the way of the smooth operation of the chamber here in the Legislative Council. I note that some of the temporary rules from COVID that changed the way the Council divides and the Council operates need to be made permanent and some of them are no longer relevant and need to be changed.

I would like to thank all the members on the committee, including my colleagues Wendy Lovell and David Davis but also the President, Minister Erdogan, Dr Mansfield, Jaclyn Symes and Sonja Terpstra. It is quite an important committee for the operation of the Parliament, and it was reassuring and very good in the way in which it operated. If members of the public were able to see the amount of bipartisan agreement and colleagues of different stripes working together, there would be a lot more trust in members of Parliament. But these are important changes to standing orders.

I think a lot of the changes are very, very sensible, with changes to different rules of the Legislative Council, from Acting President rules to ringing of bells, to temporary orders being made permanent or being scrapped and also to moving between debates. The motion also makes important changes to the way that personal explanations operate, making sure they do not infringe on standing order 12.18, making sure they are brief and also making sure they are factual. I think this is an important change, and that was recognised by the entire committee.

I thank the committee for its work. I thank the clerks for the way in which they went about it. Changes to standing orders are not often the top news story of the day, but they are very important for a functioning democracy, so I commend the motion.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:42): I also rise to make a contribution in regard to the standing orders review and the work of the Procedure Committee and the motion moved by Ms Symes. At the outset I would like to thank you, President, for chairing this committee. I would also like to thank the clerks, Robert McDonald and Richard Willis, Annemarie Burt, Juliana Duan, Tom Mills, Natalie Tyler and the whole secretariat team and also the people who worked with us on the production of this report. I might say at the outset – I reflect on Minister Symes's comment that it is a little bit like therapy for the clerks, but it is important because sometimes our procedures can be lumpy or clunky and sometimes practices can develop in this chamber that might not be perfectly consistent with the standing orders – that it presented a really good opportunity for the Procedure Committee to come together in a bipartisan way and look at how we could streamline things in here. I guess that is the best way to put it.

The sorts of things that the review was focused on were things like reviewing the temporary orders and the sessional orders; looking at incorporating temporary rules that the Council has operated under for some time into standing orders – and I will come back to that in a minute; aligning the written rules with the current practices of the Council; correcting minor language and grammatical errors; and clarifying contradictory and irrelevant rules that have made an application, explanation or interpretation of the standing orders difficult. These are the sorts of things that the Procedure Committee was focused on in the first place.

I just want to focus on one of the things in terms of practices that have happened in this chamber. When I was first elected to this chamber – and some people who have been here longer will also remember this – the way that we used to conduct divisions was that members on different sides of the house, depending on what they were voting on, had to actually walk across the floor and sit in another seat. Then, when they were sitting on the other side, the Deputy President at the time would appoint

tellers to conduct a count. That would invariably be one MP from one side and one MP from another. Both would conduct an independent count and then come together, and hopefully the numbers they had counted would align. It was always funny when sometimes that did not actually work and then another count would happen. That style of conducting a division in terms of procedure was lengthy.

Then came COVID, when because of the need to have distancing requirements in place, with walking across the chamber, the process began of people just standing in their place and rising to be counted by the clerks. I actually think it is far more practical and, in a commonsense way, works better. Standing in your place and having the clerks count – they are the ones that are doing it. They tick it off and then pass whatever they have counted to the President. I think that is a commonsense and much more practical way of conducting divisions. I know Mr Davis interjected and said he did not like it, but I think every other member I have spoken to in this place actually likes the way that we do divisions these days. It is a lot less disruptive for the chamber and makes more sense. That is just one example.

Again, there is also the removal of clunky language, legalese or superfluous words that are not necessary and do not actually add anything to the rule – things like that. I actually recommend that MPs in this chamber have a read of it, because obviously these will be the standing orders that will apply for anyone who is in this place in the course of the next Parliament.

Also, I think one of the things that Mr Galea talked about was the ringing of the bells. We have all been in here on very late evenings when there are a lot of amendments to bills and the like. The standing orders talk about the ringing of division bells for 4 minutes. If everyone is in the chamber and it is agreed, why not ring the bells for a minute? That is just common sense. That is just the practical reality of streamlining the way we do things, and that can be reflected in the temporary orders as well.

Again, these are just a reflection of the practices that are developed, and the clerks are alerting us to the fact that it would be better and more appropriate to have these sorts of procedures and practices actually reflected in the standing orders, so if there is any disagreement or concern or misunderstanding about what is eventuating, it is clear to everybody what those things are.

The Procedure Committee is a committee for all members who are on it to come together in a bipartisan way, because – as the President just remarked on previously – when we are dealing with an amendment, the standing orders, the sessional orders, all those orders, are owned by this chamber. Not one person or one party actually owns them, and it is about how the chamber itself decides it wants to operate. We may not agree on everything, but oftentimes we land on a position that people can live with. It is not going to be perfectly aligned to everyone's points of view, and that is often sometimes where we land.

I do just want to take a moment to talk about the points that were raised by Mr Davis and also by Dr Mansfield in regard to the production of documents. I note that the views of Mr Davis and Dr Mansfield were that perhaps this review also was a bit of a missed opportunity to further refine things, I am gathering, because they are still not happy with the way in which documents are produced in this chamber. But what I want to say is that the Procedure Committee met and had a detailed review of that process. We had information from clerks in New South Wales, a different jurisdiction to us, and we learned a lot about how other jurisdictions deal with the production of documents. When we did that review, it was pretty clear that we said, 'Well, let's see how this goes.'

Again, it is a matter for this chamber that if people are still unhappy with the way those things operate, then there are opportunities to review that. I do not see that this review of the standing orders brought by the clerks was actually a point to raise that. Nevertheless it is something that I remember because I was on the committee, and I am sure others who were on it as well remember this. We all agreed that if there is not any improvement seen, there is an opportunity to review that in the future, so it is not like closing the door. I get a little bit disappointed with remarks like 'Oh, nothing's changed.' We did say, 'Well, let's try this and see if it improves things.' It might be that one or two individuals might have a view about that, but it is a matter for this chamber to make a decision about those things. So if

it is the will of this chamber to look at those things in a future Parliament, then so be it, and there can be all sorts of views put about it as well. The Procedure Committee is not an opportunity for partisan politics. It is an opportunity in a bipartisan way to look at how this chamber can operate effectively.

I will conclude my remarks there. It is a good report. I do encourage members in this chamber to have a read of it. I commend the report to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:50): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1597, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### ***Bills***

#### **Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026**

#### ***Second reading***

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:51): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The Victorian energy efficiency target (VEET) is the legislative and certificate-based scheme established under the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. It requires energy retailers to generate certificates representing emissions reduction or else pay a shortfall penalty if they fail to meet the targets. The act is designed to promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficiency. The Victorian energy upgrades is the public-facing part of that program. Accredited providers create certificates by delivering eligible energy upgrades, and the value of those certificates helps fund discounts for households and businesses. When consumers switch or upgrade to more energy-efficient products and services, they can access discounts and rebates through the VEU. The scheme is in the order of \$600 million to \$700 million and is paid through a levy on every household and business electricity consumer.

This is an increasing matter that will require greater transparency and openness. This is a significant component of the bills of families and businesses. The VEU program and the VEET scheme management have been diabolical in many cases, Multiple corrupt distributors have been a highlight. People will remember at one point the delivery of multiple fridges to commercial premises. Some aspects of the scheme are unopposed, but we had shonks and crooks running the scheme for a while and there were multiple efforts to constrain that. Then we had the incompetence of the delivery of up to six fridges to one business premises. In many cases people were keen on a single energy-efficient fridge, but very few of the businesses needed two or four or even in some cases six new energy-efficient fridges delivered to their premises. What I am saying here – it was very stark, as people will remember, the fridges lined up outside the front of the businesses or stacked in some cases up high – is that the scheme has been run in a diabolically bad way on many occasions. There has not been proper cost control and there has not been proper oversight over the scheme.

The department runs the scheme, and the department undertook a strategic review in 2025. That strategic review has never been released despite multiple requests and documents orders. It is notable that the documents orders for the scheme have been flagrantly disregarded by government and the strategic review has not been released. We do seek its release and we will move a reasoned amendment

to say we should not proceed until the government provides that review. The documents were ordered by the Parliament – Ms Terpstra was talking about documents a moment ago – but this is a classic case where the department does a review into its own performance. We think it is like getting your kids to mark their own homework. It is probably not the best review, but there has been a review done. The government has based two tranches of legislation on that review and they refuse to show it to anyone.

The Parliament asked for it on 2 April 2025, seeking the submissions to the VEU strategic review as well. On 16 April 2025 the government gave the standard response that they did not have enough time. They have since made no attempt to comply with the orders of Parliament and provide the documents. Really? It is a strategic review paid for by the department and taxpayers. It looks at the program that is in the previous bill and in this bill and it makes recommendations, but the government does not want to show us what the review says. Why would that be? Why is the government so resistant? What do they have to hide? I think they have got quite a lot to hide, because I think even a modest strategic review done by the department looking at itself would not be able to sweep every failing of the scheme away. We think the review should be in the public domain. We do not think that is a lot to ask. It has already been paid for by taxpayers, and the chamber ought to have a chance to look at this strategic review. No document provision despite the request – what on earth is the reason for that? I do not believe there is any legitimate reason.

We will put a second-reading reasoned amendment to demand that the bill should not proceed until the strategic review is released. Of course the government could just release the strategic review now. They could just give it to every member of the chamber and say, ‘Have a look; you can make your own conclusions about what’s in the review.’ It would take them literally minutes to comply with that request. Alternatively, we could even have moved this at the beginning of the committee of the whole as a way to seek some further information. I also make it clear that most of the amendments in this bill are not rejected by the opposition; we will not oppose the bill in that sense, so let us be clear about that.

We do also make an election commitment that we will release the strategic review – the secret strategic review that the government has now for 18 months sought to hide. Why? What is the terrible thing that is in that review? The election commitment is that we will release that review quickly on coming to government. Let us see what they had to hide and why.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Mr Davis, would you like to move the reasoned amendment now?

**David DAVIS:** Yes, that would be fine. It is actually quite straightforward. I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government releases the strategic review of the Victorian energy upgrades scheme undertaken by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.’

The main purpose of the bill is to expand and update the energy upgrades scheme following the government’s strategic review – the secret strategic review – broadening the objectives beyond greenhouse gas emissions reduction, including principles and updating terminology to align with that particular expansion. The bill also has a mechanism to allow certificates to be created for the delivery of benefits in addition to emissions reduction in line with the expanded objectives of the VEU. My concern with these sorts of expansions is you have got a scheme that is poorly run, a scheme that has got a track record of careering out of control, a scheme that has got a track record of delivering multiple fridges to businesses when they are not requested, and you want to expand it. So we have a level of caution in this. We are not opposing the bill, but we mark this out with a measure of caution. We do not trust the government’s ability to do this. We think the review should be in the public domain.

The role of the Essential Services Commission (ESC) is also strengthened in regulating the VEU and providing greater consumer protection, it is claimed. I think there are legitimate questions about how well the Essential Services Commission has managed its role in this scheme, and the strategic review,

you would hope, actually goes to those matters. There are legitimate questions about how effectively the Essential Services Commission has managed these matters. The bill also makes some separate amendments to the electricity industry and gas industry acts to establish a register of gas licence exemptions held by the ESC and extend mine rehabilitation licences and obligations. In particular, the bill extends the Hazelwood mining licence for rehabilitation purposes.

Clauses 1 and 2 set out the main purposes of the bill and establish the phased commencement. Clauses 3 to 7 rename the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act to the Victorian Energy Upgrades Target Act 2007 – so we change the name – and add objectives concerning energy affordability and flexible demand together. I should say that the response of demand management is a very important part of our approach as a community. Certainly, if we are elected, the opposition will be focusing on what we can do to enhance demand management of our energy supplies. We are obviously awash in many parts of the day with solar now. Batteries have got a critical role, and we understand that. But more can be done with demand management, shifting usage and shifting the time periods when appliance and other energy consumption occur to the times closer to and as part of those periods where there is significant energy in the system that sometimes is seeking a home. Clauses 8 to 9 give the ESC a clearer responsibility for administering the VEU, and we do not disagree with that. But at the same time, the review should have looked at the behaviour and the competence of the ESC, and the review is still secret. So we are giving more power over here although it is very clear that the ESC has been less than perfect in oversighting the scheme.

Clauses 10 to 34 establish activities allowing the minister to declare eligible VEU activities and determine classification calculations and conditions. Powers may be delegated to the departmental secretary. Clauses 35 and 36 target adjustment orders, allowing the minister to increase or decrease the annual VEU target when considered necessary. Clauses 37 to 40 allow energy retailers and other relevant entities to carry forward up to 10 per cent of their annual certificate liability into the following year. Clauses 41 to 46 require information relating to consumer discounts, upgrade prices and certificate transfer prices to be given to the ESC and in special circumstances published. Clauses 47 and 48 widen the circumstance in which the ESC can share information. Clause 49 requires the minister to cause a review of the operations of the act to be concluded on or before 1 October 2032. We think that is too far away given the secret strategic review has never been released. We think that needs to be in the public domain, and it may be that any deficiencies in that review need to be remedied by further, earlier review. Clauses 50 to 54 limit statutory self-incrimination protections to natural persons rather than corporations. Clauses 55 to 64 broaden officer inspection, search, questioning and warrant powers. This government is always after more powers. Clauses 65 to 118 – ‘Other amendments’ – make terminology and consequential changes.

Part 3 amends the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to replace terminology dealing with the ESC’s function and amends the Local Government Act 1989 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. Parts 4 and 5 amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Gas Industry Act 2001 to regulate or prohibit specified electricity and gas fees and establish a register of gas licence exemptions. Part 6 deals with extending the rehabilitation and bond obligations of the former authority holders and extends Hazelwood’s mining licence until its declared mine rehabilitation plan takes effect. Part 7, through clause 146, automatically repeals the amending act.

As I say, this is not a bill that we want to oppose, but we do have those issues. Where are the public submissions to the review? A wide range of stakeholders submitted.

**Jacinta Ermacora:** Just say what you are going to do.

**David DAVIS:** Well, a large amount of public money has been spent on the review. What do you have to hide, Ms Ermacora? What is it that the government wants to hide? Why?

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Order! I will just remind members to speak through the Chair.

**David DAVIS:** We consulted with a large range of stakeholders on this bill. They raised concerns about the bill's impact on consumers – costs and prices – and the effect on investment. These are legitimate points in the context of the failure to release the review and all of the submissions to the review. We think it has been hard to pull out some of the detail that we would have liked on this.

Let us make the point very clearly. We are not opposing the bill. We do have some reservations about the management of the scheme. Even you, Ms Ermacora, cannot think it is a good idea to see six fridges delivered to a business unrequested. That is not a good idea. Even you have to admit that. Come on, let us be generous and admit that that is not a good thing, or do you want to defend it? You want to defend it, do you?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Mr Davis, I remind you to make comments via the Chair.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, I do know I have got to talk through the Chair. I have said what I need to say. We have moved the reasoned amendment. We will not oppose the bill. We know there are problems with the scheme. The scheme does perform some very useful functions, though, and they need to be performed in a way that delivers for the community and does that in a cost-effective way.

**Tom McIntOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:06): I rise to speak in support of the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I am going to follow on from the interjection of Ms Ermacora. Energy is an incredibly serious matter. It is central to our economy. Our economy does not function without energy. We have just seen the Shadow Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction – the alternative government on the other side – waffling on for 15 to 20 minutes, as we have seen him do repeatedly when he needs to speak on energy, offering nothing to Victorians. Our families in their homes need affordable electricity. Our industry needs affordable, reliable electricity, and our small businesses need it. It is so crucial to everything we do in this state, and that is why I am incredibly proud to be a member of the Labor Party, which has put consistent policy out to the public and out to industry for two decades. Meanwhile those on the other side have played politics with it all.

From a consumer perspective the Labor Party supported solar on people's homes and the Liberals opposed it – they laughed at it. Now 40 per cent of homes have solar on their rooftops. Batteries have rolled out and are now in 600,000 homes across Australia. EVs – we know they have smirked and laughed at them. One in three cars sold is now a plug-in electric vehicle. This is all about people getting energy independence. It is about ensuring affordable electricity flows down the wires to their homes and to their businesses. It is about ensuring that they feel secure in the electricity that they can generate and consume in their own homes. Part of that security, from a grid perspective, is the support that solar and wind farms have had in clear policy settings, and that has been absent from those on the other side. There is the investment the Victorian government has made in bringing back the SEC and public investment in generation and in storage. We saw the Southern Hemisphere's biggest battery installed near Melton – 1.6 gigawatts – taking demand off the grid at peak times. We know what that has done: that has reduced power prices. We have got the cheapest power prices in Australia in Victoria because we have been consistent with our policies and we have given certainty to investment.

I was just recently out at the Delburn wind farm, the SEC's third project, a 200-megawatt wind farm only kilometres from the Hazelwood North pit mine. There are transmission lines going past and a line of sight to the existing pit mine, the substations and everything there. What do the Nationals do? They come in with petitions against it. There are hundreds of jobs in constructing it. As I walked that site, I met local trainees and apprentices from Mirboo North and from the valley there working in the energy industry. That is something I am particularly passionate about, having been an electrician myself – I am still an electrician. We have put TAFE and training around people to be able to skill up

in the sector and to be able to provide, particularly for our homes and our businesses, as they electrify their homes. It means lower costs and a lower cost of living when you have cheaper heating, when you have cheaper hot water and when you have cheaper cooking. It is a cost-of-living measure for people. To ensure that the power coming down those lines is cheaper, we have done things like ensuring the Marinus Link is put in, connecting our states. 750 megawatts, when we have got abundant solar during the middle of the day, we will be able to send there, and then when we need it, as hydro it can come back.

We know that Yallourn is reaching end of life. Six hundred million dollars went into their generators last year to keep them going. Loy Yang A is more reliable, but again, it was built in the 1980s. Loy Yang B is more reliable – built in the 1990s. But we know these technologies are coming to the end of their life, and we know the cheapest technologies to put in are solar and wind. We are talking \$50 to \$100 a megawatt. We are talking \$120 a megawatt. Whereas the Liberals and their shadow energy spokesperson are stuck on gas. Those of us that were on the oil and gas decommissioning inquiry at the start of this year heard firsthand from industry that the oil platforms are being pulled out. There is no oil left there. The gas platforms are running out of gas, and they are strategically being decommissioned over the next 10 years.

The question to the Liberals, consistent with their 20 years of hiding away from energy policy, is: what is it you offer? What is it they offer to keep energy prices down? Mr Davis has attended two offshore wind industry events in the last week, and he has offered nothing to the tens of billions of dollars of investment, to the multigenerational jobs that are on offer or to the gigawatts of electricity supply for Victorians. You have offered nothing but cheap politics, and that is consistent with the Liberal Party for the last 20 years on energy. That is a big reason why the Liberal Party has been decimated. We know in Victoria there are probably half a dozen federal Liberal representatives left. Instead of doing the hard yards and coming up with policy, working with industry and being leaders in community, they divide people and stoke fear, and we have seen that with VNI West just in the last week. It is these actions that are going to increase power costs. It is these actions that are going to lessen power supply. A simple little theory that the Liberals might want to get across is that when you have more supply of something, it costs less.

There is another word that you will never hear the Liberals say. I spoke before about how key energy is to our economy. The other key part of that is the climate. Our farmers cannot be as productive when their soil temperatures are higher and when the weather patterns are less consistent. Our insurance bills all go up when storm events, fire and flood hit properties. We all pay for it. When food costs more to land in our supermarkets, we are all paying for it. You cannot uncouple energy and emissions. It is a massive task, decarbonising our economy, but we simply must do it to keep our cost of living low. We had the hottest day on record in January, 49 degrees, and we are consistently seeing more and more days that are breaking those temperature records. On that day our grid had its highest ever demand in Victoria – 11 gigawatts. But did you hear Mr Davis or any of the Liberals congratulate all those workers that are working in our generation and in our distribution – the thousands of electricians and engineers and everyone that has put in work in the last two decades in this massive task of designing the energy network we need for this century?

As I have said many times in this place, we acknowledge and we thank those in the energy sector, which was established last century, for everything they have done for those generation and transmission networks that continue to operate. It has been key to Victoria's economic success, to things like our automotive industry, to have that generation and supply in our state. But for the reasons I outlined before, whether it is the cost of building or whether it is what we must do on reducing our emissions, we need to build the energy network for this century.

I have talked about various things the Liberals have talked down, particularly for home consumers. Consumers, Victorians, have seen it. They laughed at solar. They have laughed at home batteries. They laugh at new technologies. But the new technologies always prove the Liberals wrong. Central to Mr Davis's narrative consistently is gas. We on this side recognise the need for gas. That is why there

is 2.5 gigawatts of gas built into our 95 per cent renewable energy target and our emissions reduction targets. But it begs the question: if the Liberals are going to rip up everything, and presuming that nuclear has gone by the wayside – under Dutton for a good 12 to 18 months it was going to be small modular nuclear reactors, until they realised they do not exist, and then it was going to be large-scale nuclear, until they realised no-one would invest in it and no-one would vote for it. Now it is all about gas. As I said, Labor recognises the place for gas. But where are the Liberals going to get the gas? I just talked about the inquiry finding that there is no more gas in Bass Strait, so there is only one way that that leaves the Liberals to get their gas, and that is by fracking farms.

Energy is critically important to every single one of us. It is a policy that we should be taking incredibly seriously. It is incredibly serious to our cost of living and incredibly serious to the operation of our state. The Liberals have proven, year after year after year, they do not take it seriously and they are not creating the policy and the investment space to ensure more generation. I am incredibly proud to be part of a Labor Party that over decades has set those clear policies and has supported home owners and businesses to have cheaper electricity and will continue to do so going on into the future.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:18): Thank you so much for the opportunity to follow my colleague, Mr McIntosh, and make a contribution on the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. Perhaps I might speak to the particulars of this bill for the benefit of the chamber and note that this bill makes amendments across several key acts, but today I want to focus particularly on the changes to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007, which modernise, expand and futureproof the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program.

At its absolute core this legislation is about helping Victorian families, households and small businesses cut down their energy bills right across our state. In our regional towns, throughout our outer suburbs and across inner-city neighbourhoods household budgets are under strain, and power and gas bills represent a major portion of weekly living expenses. That is why our Labor government approach energy policy with a relentless focus on practical household relief. We know that the clean energy transition must include long-term targets to keep us on track but also deliver immediate, workable benefits that show up as lower bills at the kitchen table and reduced overheads on the factory floor.

The VEU is key to that delivery. It is the largest and most successful household energy savings initiative in Australia. The structure of the scheme is straightforward and effective. It provides households and businesses with generous up-front discounts so they can replace outdated equipment with modern, highly efficient electric technology. Since its commencement the VEU has helped over 2.4 million homes and 1800 businesses complete energy efficiency upgrades. Over that time the scheme has saved more than 90 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere. In 2025 alone more than 147 households and 13,000 businesses participated in the program, carrying out over 340,000 individual upgrades and cutting 6.9 million tonnes of carbon emissions in a single 12-month window. That included a record-breaking 70,000 heating and cooling upgrades, alongside 32,000 families who replaced old and inefficient gas hot water units with modern heat pumps, a feature right across the northern suburbs.

These numbers represent significant financial relief for Victorian families. When a household replaces an inefficient gas heater with an energy-efficient, reverse-cycle split system, they can save money off the purchase and installation costs through the VEU discounts. Following that, there is up to \$1000 every single year in ongoing bill savings. Upgrading an old gas hot water system to a heat pump delivers up to \$560 in up-front discounts and cuts around \$400 a year off power bills. When a home transitions completely off gas and disconnects from the gas network entirely, they eliminate fixed network supply charges, keeping an extra \$360 a year in their pocket. For small businesses, participating in VEU upgrades can deliver yearly savings from \$500 right up to \$74,000 depending on the scale and nature of their operations.

The beauty of the VEU program is that its benefits extend to every single Victorian, including those who have not yet undertaken an upgrade themselves. By supporting millions of energy-efficient upgrades, the VEU permanently reduces the overall demand across the grid. It lowers energy demand, reduces wholesale electricity costs and avoids the need to build expensive new generation, transmission and distribution assets. Between 2021 and 2025 alone the VEU program avoided an estimated \$3.8 billion in energy system costs, ensuring that all Victorians benefit from downward pressure on energy prices.

I certainly had the good fortune during my time as Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action to spend a lot of time with community organisations and local groups right across the state. I sat down and I talked to those communities, I talked to those organisations, and I saw firsthand their commitment to environmental sustainability. It is genuine, it is passionate and it is very real. You also hear their practical concerns. They want to reduce emissions. They want to switch away from fossil gas, but they need the up-front costs to be manageable. They want clear, affordable pathways to installing rooftop solar, home battery storage, reverse-cycle air conditioning and induction cooktops. The VEU is the practical mechanism that puts those technologies within financial reach for working families.

It is true that the operating environment for energy in Victoria has changed since the original legislation passed in 2007. Back then almost all of our electricity came from burning brown coal, and renewable energy accounted for just 3 per cent of generation. But today, under this Labor government, over 44 per cent of Victoria's electricity comes from renewables. The system has evolved. The legislative framework underpinning the VEU must evolve as well. That is why I am here and so proud to speak to this bill before us.

We will continue to build a modern, reliable renewable energy grid, hold energy retailers accountable and ensure the VEU program delivers cheap, cleaner energy for every Victorian household and business. Without doubt and with great pride I commend the bill to the house.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (11:24): I rise to speak on the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The bill implements recommendations from the 2024 review into the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) scheme and makes some improvements to the plan for rehabilitating the Hazelwood coalmine. Importantly, this bill amends the legal framework for Victorian energy upgrades to recognise not just emissions reduction but also the social, environmental and economic benefits.

Having energy-efficient appliances like electric hot water systems, heating and cooktops makes a huge difference to the comfort and wellbeing of households as well as to their bills, and it is important to recognise this. For example, gas cooktops have been strongly linked to childhood asthma and, along with other gas appliances, they keep people hooked on an expensive form of energy. The VEU has promoted the uptake of efficient electric appliances like induction cooktops, as has been said, which are a brilliant replacement for gas. If you do not believe me, there are some really great community groups who run cooking workshops to show you how to use an induction cooktop. I will give a shout-out to Asian Australians for Climate Action, who run some of these workshops in my electorate. I had the pleasure of attending one at the Health Festival of Geelong last year. Other things covered by the scheme include window glazing and, thanks to Greens advocacy, ceiling insulation. These are really important measures that improve the efficiency and thermal comfort of homes.

For this to have a big impact, there is a lot more work that needs to be done. Having spent the last eight years trying to retrofit an old, gas-dependent, hole-ridden weatherboard to a reasonably insulated, all-electric house, I can tell you it is not an easy process. It is hard to find information. It is hard to find experienced tradespeople who are familiar with newer options, including for any repairs you might need to make to, say, a heat pump hot water system. Even with the VEU, it is still really expensive. In short, we are a long way from efficient electric homes being business as usual in this state or accessible to most Victorians, and they are certainly not an easy option for people who are on lower incomes.

We know that renters and people on lower incomes face compounding inequalities when it comes to housing and, increasingly, exposure to climate risks. Living in a house that is sweltering in summer or freezing in winter is a significant contributor to poor health and mortality, and it is something countless Victorians experience. We have terrible-quality housing from an energy efficiency and thermal comfort perspective; it is just not built for the actual conditions we live with. The existing stock is certainly not up to scratch given the risks that we are facing as the planet heats.

Climate Safe Rooms is a brilliant initiative which originated in Geelong and has been taken up across the state. It works with people who are on lower incomes and living with chronic illnesses to modify at least one room in their home to make sure it does not become uncomfortably hot or cold. But if we are to ensure that all people have safe, comfortable and affordable housing, especially in the face of a changing climate, there is an urgent need for much more radical investment and change.

To date, Labor really has been dragging its heels when it comes to taking climate adaptation seriously. We have seen that with the planning changes that have been rolled out by Labor over the past couple of years that watered down energy-efficiency standards for townhouses and mid-rise buildings, allowed the removal of trees and vegetation and failed to properly take into account risks like flooding. The government has also ignored the major recommendations from the Greens-initiated climate resilience inquiry. One of the main recommendations was the establishment of a permanent climate adaptation fund, and this is something that still has not been responded to. The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience has estimated that for every \$1 invested in resilience before a disaster, we can save between \$3 and \$8 in recovery. But Victoria does not even scratch the surface. According to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action corporate plan for 2025–2029, less than 1 per cent of their \$2.6 billion budget – just \$18.4 million – is going to be spent on climate action. Meanwhile, the NSW Climate Change Fund spent almost \$162 million in 2020–25 to increase community resilience and safeguard our communities from the effects of climate change, with additional funds for mitigation and energy bills.

Victoria's new draft adaptation action plans 2027–2031 have been strongly critiqued by a number of organisations for a lack of funding, evaluation, vision and even basic due diligence. As the Biodiversity Council's response points out, the new plans have no clear objectives, outcomes or vision for adaptation; there is barely anything on the government's current actions, let alone how they have progressed or what gaps or challenges they are facing; there is nothing in the way of responsibilities or timeframes for actions; there is no consideration of larger cross-system risks that we are already facing under climate change; and there is not even any evaluation of the government's last action plans, despite that being a requirement of Victoria's own climate laws. Section 35(3) of the Climate Action Act 2017 states that:

The nominated Minister must ensure that an adaptation action plan includes a report on the implementation and effectiveness, as at the time the plan is prepared, of any previous adaptation action plan prepared by that Minister.

That is right: the government might even be in breach of its own climate laws. The Greens are calling on Labor to fundamentally overhaul those action plans and implement the Biodiversity Council's seven recommendations. That means an audit of current actions, actual funding and vision for future actions, building some monitoring requirements in the department and tackling cross-systems risk by bringing climate action into the Premier's office. We also need to lock in some targets for vulnerable cohorts under this bill as soon as possible.

As behind as Victoria already is – I must note that taking on the contribution of Mr Davis has only reinforced this – the Liberals, Nationals and One Nation only want to take us back even further. We have seen in the past week the coalition announce that they will rip up critical transmission infrastructure should they be elected, which will blow out both our energy bills and our climate targets. Jess Wilson has even pledged to overturn a very basic cost-of-living measure that really works hand in hand with some of the measures outlined in this bill, which is that new residential homes and most

commercial buildings must be all electric. New all-electric homes would save around \$1000 on energy bills compared to homes with fossil gas. The only reason the Liberals want to bring back new gas connections is to funnel even more money from everyday Victorians to their oil and gas donors. At a time when Victorians are already facing worsening fires, floods and extreme heat, locking more homes into fossil fuels will only accelerate the climate crisis. The Liberals and One Nation are in a grubby race to the bottom on climate, competing to see who can drag Victoria furthest backwards into expensive, dirty coal and gas. Sadly, Labor keeps following them there. As strong as a program like the VEU is, Labor has spent years shifting the goalposts in the same direction, watering down its electrification plans and ditching the phase-out of new gas cooktops and gas space heaters while opening new areas for gas drilling and approving the biggest new Victorian gas project in more than a decade.

Let us be absolutely clear on this: the climate cannot handle any new fossil fuel projects, and we do not need to open any new fossil fuel projects. Around 80 per cent of Australia's gas is exported as liquefied natural gas. We actually burn more gas creating the LNG exports than the entire manufacturing sector uses. What is worse is the gas industry pays zero royalties on more than 50 per cent of our exports. Governments are basically letting these oil and gas companies destroy our country and the climate for nothing. That is a world-class rort at the best of times. Now with the war on Iran driving up fuel prices, it has gotten to absurd levels. Eight of the world's biggest oil giants have made over \$125 billion in profits in the past three months. That is textbook war profiteering, all built on human misery and the climate crisis. Australia needs to finally tax these fossil fuel giants and put the money into slashing bills and transitioning to 100 per cent cheap, clean, renewable energy.

None of the establishment political parties in Australia want to tax their fossil fuel donors – not the Liberals, not the Nationals, not One Nation and not Labor. Look how hard Prime Minister Anthony Albanese just fought to kill the 25 per cent gas export tax. These political parties are fundamentally compromised, because they rely on donations from coal, oil and gas companies to fund their campaigns. Ahead of last year's federal election just three fossil fuel companies – Adani, Hancock Prospecting and INPEX – made a combined \$1.51 million in contributions to both Labor and the coalition, including to their state branches. One Nation do not even pretend to hide who they are really working for. It is why Pauline Hanson can accept a \$1 million jet from Gina Rinehart and then vote against taxing the billion-dollar gas export industry.

The Greens cannot be bought like that. We do not take dirty corporate donations. Victorians deserve better than a choice between the Liberals and One Nation sabotaging the renewable energy transition and a Labor government that talks about climate action while approving more coal and gas and fails to tax the fossil fuel corporations properly. That is why we are fighting to finally tax the big coal and gas giants as well as fast-track cheaper, publicly owned renewable energy and provide support to help every household get off gas and cut their bills. All that being said, this is a step in the right direction. We will be supporting this bill. I will, however, have a number of questions during the committee stage.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:35): I am also pleased to rise to talk on the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I have a very alternate view to Dr Mansfield on this bill, and I would like to challenge many of the ideas that Dr Mansfield has put forward here.

Firstly, let us start with the Victorian energy upgrades scheme. Historically, this scheme has been nothing more than dodgy accounting, a corruption magnet, as has been pointed out by the government itself and many others in the chamber. We only need to cast our minds back to what was already spoken about earlier, the fridges, but even earlier than that, when initially the power boards were given out to many people in houses, then got immediately thrown in the bin – but of course somehow they were saving on carbon emissions. People talk as if – I know the Greens talk this way but often the government does as well – Victoria is going to change global weather systems. That is not going to happen. Victoria is nothing more than a rounding error in the scheme of things here. What we do is irrelevant in the scheme of things.

The Greens would like us to sign up and tie our hands behind our backs and hold back our prosperity so that we can say that we are doing our part for the global masters. But here is the thing: we keep hearing this talk about clean renewables. Well, let us look at the polysilicate supply chain issue, shall we? We keep hearing about how solar energy is cheap, and one of the reasons it is cheap is because the polysilicate supply chain is tainted by slave labour. The Greens often talk about cheap renewables; well, when it is cheap because it is produced effectively by slave labour in China, we should be questioning why we are signing ourselves up to this. Also, we hear about clean energy with wind turbines. No-one seems to want to talk about the rare earth processing that is happening in China for this and the environmental devastation that is being caused by the rare earth production of neodymium. Yet when Victoria wants to produce its own rare earth metals, the Greens are the first to oppose it, even though the main reason that we need these rare earths is because of the renewables industry. So I completely challenge that.

Even putting aside the strategic stupidity of tying ourselves up to what we call an energy transition, which is effectively a perpetual transition because the life cycle of this infrastructure is so short – 30 years tops for a wind turbine; solar panels, much shorter than that – we are already at the point now where we are starting to have to replace the early infrastructure that was put in around the turn of the century, and we will be doing this forever. And the only reason that it is ‘cheap’ is because we are tying ourselves up to being perpetually dependent on China. Can anyone actually put their hand up and say that is a good idea? I do not think that is a good idea. I do not think many Australians think that is a good idea. We have had the opportunity and blown it to expand our nuclear capabilities, to have nuclear energy. Apparently the climate is very important, but not so important that we want to use technologies that might make us energy-independent, which is a disaster for Australia.

We are seeing a lot of people get upset – the Greens especially – about the rise of data centres. We need data centres. We need them in Australia. We need them everywhere. The reason that many people are getting upset about this is because data centres highlight just how fragile and unprepared our energy grid really is. We are actually going to need far more energy than what we are planning on. We are struggling at the moment just to roll out enough energy for what we thought we needed before. Actually, the amount of energy we need is far greater than what anyone has been planning on, because we need these data centres. The solution for many on the far left is to just oppose the data centres. What happens then? We will find ourselves again dependent on China. This is a disgraceful position to put ourselves in when we had the option all along to be energy independent. If we are not going to go ahead with rolling out a nuclear fleet, the option that sooner or later the government is going to have to realise, not because they choose to but because physical reality will come and smack them in the face, is that we need to expand our coal power generation fleet. I am sorry to break it to the government, but this idea that we are going to phase out our coal power generation in Victoria and nothing is going to go wrong is a fantasy.

The sooner people start talking about what we are going to do about replacing our coal-powered fleet – and even expanding it in Victoria – the better. There are a lot of people who are very keen on this idea. The number is growing by the day, and people these days are more worried about their energy bills than they are about climate change. Whatever rounding error Victoria might be playing a part in, we need to think about how we are going to produce our own energy and how to not be dependent on China forever. We need to think about what is best for Victoria, not what is best for the UN and not what is best for some international treaties that we have signed up for. We need to think about what is best for Australia, and I do not think that we are doing that. I do not think that we are doing that at all.

If people really cared about climate change, they would be focusing on the countries that are actually causing this. China’s expansion of its coal fleet completely eclipses anything that Victoria or Australia would do. They are the ones that are causing this expansion of carbon emissions. Australia really is not that big of a deal in the global scheme of things. Why we have hamstrung ourselves like this is totally beyond me. It is a mistake, and the mistake is going to be self-evident soon enough. The

government has already realised that we cannot do this without a massive expansion of gas generation capability.

**David Davis** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** They are still resistant, but they have realised they need gas. They cannot do it without gas. The batteries are not going to cut it. The batteries will be fine for small-scale stabilisation, but we are going to need gas forever because we have set ourselves up this way. We did not need gas generation so much before the renewables rollout. Gas is being depended on because of the renewables rollout, because we need to maintain electricity supply when the wind is not blowing or the sun is not shining. I do not see a way out of that, actually. The government clearly does not see a way out of it. We are going to have gas as part of our network forever, pretty much. I think that we need to take a new direction, to paraphrase the Premier's favourite saying. I think Victorians realise, and Australians realise, that this net zero fantasy needs to be abandoned. The more people that wake up to that fact, the better, because what we are doing here is not having any real effect in the real world.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (11:44): I am pleased to make a brief contribution on the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I am not going to reiterate what Mr McIntosh said, nor Ms Watt. They have contributed on the benefits and successes of the Victorian energy upgrades program and the reasons why it will be a very good thing for that program to be expanded and provide more opportunities for Victorians to save money on renewable energy. What I want to go into is my concern about what is not being said by those opposite about their attitude towards wind energy, their attitude towards solar energy and their attitude towards a renewable energy adaptation that we know we need to do. We are getting this 'Say nothing'.

I was at the Gippsland celebration of offshore wind event earlier this week – and it has been a long week – where there were 50 or 60 businesspeople, community members, government people and opposition and crossbench people in the room celebrating the auction that has opened up for offshore wind in Gippsland. There were documents and enthusiasm everywhere about the job opportunities that will come from that and the transition from coal and how that will happen. This community is at the coalface of the transition – pardon the pun; I did not even realise that. All right, I will double down: they are at the coalface of the transition from coal to renewable energy, and they are showing us how they are going to do it. I can tell you there was enormous enthusiasm in the room, except for the dead silence when the Shadow Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction basically said nothing about the future of renewable energy. He used the words 'prudence' and 'diligence' but actually said nothing. The businesses in that room were not deluded. They do not trust the opposition.

The challenge that we will face in Victoria if they have to decommission the renewable energy industry in this state will be far bigger and far worse on the Victorian economy than it was between 2010 and 2014. It will duplicate that but be even worse. Where is the jobs plan for all of the renewable energy jobs that you plan to get rid of? Where are the investment opportunities for the businesses who will be told to go away, who will be told to stop investing in wind, investing in solar and investing in batteries? Where will those businesses go? What will happen to the Victorian economy? Renewable energy is one of the backbones of the Victorian economy now. It is a much bigger proportion of the Victorian economy than it was five or 10 years ago, so it is a huge risk for us as a state if we go ahead and allow those opposite to preside over an energy debacle. We know that is what we will end up with – an energy debacle – because that is what they have offered us over and over again on the policy front.

As Mr McIntosh said, it is only Labor that has an energy plan for Victoria – a renewable energy plan, a transition plan. It does not matter how many falsities, how much poor information and how much rubbish gets expressed by anybody opposite. We know what we are doing and we are conducting an orderly transition, and that is the main point that I want to make in making a contribution about this particular program today.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (11:49): I rise to oppose the Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The main reason for this is that I cannot stop thinking about all the people who are really paying for all of this: the families and small businesses in the Western Metro Region who open their bills and then open the next one. They are not interested in reading all these AEMO reports. They read the number at the bottom of their energy bills, and they just despair. That number is still about \$1591 a year for the average household. The government is advertising an \$84 cut – patting themselves on the back for that after a decade of this policy cost.

Let me start with what this government has built since 2022. They have written targets into the law: renewables at 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035; storage of 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. These are political dates; they are not well-made engineering plans. These percentages on a whiteboard do not help anybody; they are not cheap and they do not bring reliable power at 6 pm on a winter night. Basically, we have brought back the State Electricity Commission, a government-owned generator seeded with about \$1 billion of public money. So taxpayers are now silent partners in a company and the same government that owns the company also writes the rules that the company plays by – the conflicts of interest are everywhere. You have got a market with the umpire on the field wearing the colour of one team's jersey.

This government has closed the door on gas. From 1 January 2027 a new home cannot get new mains gas connections. From 1 March 2027 when a gas hot water system dies in an existing home, it has to be replaced with electric. Nobody voted for these kinds of interferences in their housing designs. Nobody voted for this kind of thing, but all of these projects have been fast-tracked. The development facilitation program has waved through billions in wind and battery projects – speed for the technologies the minister favours, but the ones that are not ideologically aligned get obliterated through the law.

It has banned one firm, low-emission source that could compete. Mr Limbrick brought in a bill in 2023 to repeal the 1983 nuclear prohibition. Repealing that ban costs the budget nothing. Keeping it can cost billions. Victoria banned the option first and then announced the target. Now we have got this bill in front of us, and this bill takes the Victorian energy upgrades scheme and stretches its life from 2032 to 2045 – an extra 15 years of a surcharge on every single bill – and the scheme is paid for by retailers surrendering certificates. The retailers cannot absorb the cost, and if they try to recover it in their prices, they can get fined as well. These are not real discounts. In the end it costs everybody more.

The bill also weakens the additionality rule. That means that the scheme can subsidise upgrades that another law is already about to force people to do. The government funded a strategic review of this scheme, and that review has not been tabled before the house. We are being asked to sign a cheque and ask questions later.

This government is pushing electric homes and electric cars onto the same grid that is losing coal and is blocked from nuclear, and we wonder why we are having to get energy from other states. Local poles and transformers were not built for every home to charge a car and run a heat pump after dark. These upgrades arrive later as the network charges are on our bills already.

The thread running through all of this is net zero used as a deadline. Net zero is used to justify every scheme, every ban and every dollar taken from families who never got to have a vote on any of it. I support energy policy that is decided on cost, reliability, physics and true environmentalism, not on this ideological political power play in the media. I support private investment in any lawful generation that can sell power into the market, including nuclear if it stacks up and it is safe. I support letting the market build up our power reserves so that we can bring down the cost of living. I do not support a state-owned generator writing its own rules. I support scheme costs on bills that sunset and do not extend out to 2045. I support households keeping the right to choose gas where the pipes already exist and install them if they want to on their own. I support a clean line between the regulator and the

regulated. No minister should own the assets or have an interest in the assets that they regulate. They are not radical ideas; they are the basics of conflicts of interest, and that is why I oppose this bill.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (11:54): It is an honour to sum up on an energy bill as the new Minister for Energy and Resources. Thank you, speakers, for your contributions. Of course this bill is all about ensuring that the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) scheme remains fit for purpose and modernises as we continue through our renewable energy transition, ensuring consumers remain at the heart of the program. The structure of the program is remaining the same – a certificate scheme with GHG abatement as the key metric. Thank you to speakers from the government side. It certainly indicates a commitment to cost-of-living relief for all Victorians, and the bill is strengthening a program that has a record of doing exactly that. The bill is about making it easier for all Victorians to access discounted electric appliances, both in their homes and in their businesses, making sure of course that our dwindling gas supply remains available for industries that cannot electrify. Reducing energy demands saves households money. It avoids costs that would have otherwise been borne by Victorians in extra energy infrastructure, and it places downward pressure on wholesale prices, which is why we continue to have the lowest prices in the country. If the VEU did not exist, Victorian energy bills would be higher, and that is a fact.

The bill will expand the VEU program and embed flexibility in its legal framework to enhance program integrity and strengthen its responsiveness. Many of these reforms are enabling in nature, meaning further policy analysis and regulatory work will be undertaken before they begin. For households, this means the reforms will make discounts clearer and more transparent, improve consumer protections and dispute resolution, increase access to upgrades that reduce bills and improve comfort, and support electrification options that reduce exposure to volatile gas prices. Importantly for businesses, it means the reforms will provide greater flexibility and clearer program direction; easier introduction of new activities as technologies evolve; reduced red tape for reliable, compliant participants; and improved investment certainty as Victoria's energy systems transition. It will strengthen new laws made by our government to force energy retailers to provide cheap energy to households, and it will allow the minister to ban fees and charges on energy bills. It will also strengthen compliance by embedded networks with their consumer protection obligations.

The other things that the bill does are relevant particularly to my portfolio of resources. The bill also proposes targeted time-sensitive amendments to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 to allow for continuation of the Hazelwood mining licence for rehabilitation purposes only to ensure that there are no regulatory gaps. The Hazelwood mining licence expires on 10 September 2026, and delay or non-passage would result in the removal of existing licence-based controls, which of course we would prefer not to happen because it would expose the state to public safety, environmental and financial risks.

I actually was pleased with Mr Davis's contribution today because it was in stark contrast to some pretty incredible commentary from the opposition in the lower house, who mentioned that if a reasoned amendment was not supported, then the bill would not be supported. But that position has been tempered by the shadow, who has indicated that there will not be opposition to this bill from the Liberal Party, which I think is a good thing because it would be obviously very reckless and irresponsible to not get behind a program which provides cost-of-living relief to Victorians through discounts when they upgrade their appliances, as well as ongoing through decreased energy bills. It is the Labor government who championed this program, and I am pleased to be here today with a bill to bring further improvements to the scheme. I commend the bill to the house.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (14):* Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (20):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney

**Amendment negated.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, yesterday you threw me out of question time – be that as it may – for half an hour in distinction to earlier rulings that you yourself have made that question time includes the constituency questions component. I understand from the clerks that you have now ruled that it does not include the constituency questions component of question time but that you have redefined it to be a narrower zone – just the questions without notice.

**The PRESIDENT:** I have not redefined anything. It is in the standing orders that the penalty needs to be served during questions without notice, and if it has not been served the day before, the remainder of the time needs to be served the next day.

**David Davis:** I will find the time for you. I will find the occasion for you.

**The PRESIDENT:** I cannot recall that.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** But if I said that – thank you, Ms Crozier – I would have been wrong, because it actually says in the standing orders it needs to be during questions without notice.

**David Davis:** With respect, President, that is not quite what it says, and the ruling on a previous occasion was different, so it is a question of consistency.

**Ryan Batchelor:** Further to the point of order, President, sessional order 4(2) says:

... the member may return to the Chamber at the conclusion of question time and must serve the remainder of their suspension during the next occurrence of questions without notice.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will see you in 20 minutes.

**David Davis:** Constituency questions, by you, were defined as part of questions without notice.

**The PRESIDENT:** No.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Economic policy**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:08): (1453) My question is to the Minister for Finance. Premier Carroll recently declared that he respects taxpayers money and ordered a halt to non-essential spending, including a \$70 million cut to external consultants and advisers over the next four years. Minister, the Suburban Rail Loop Authority spent \$466,950 on three concurrent contracts with different consultants for executive recruitment services. Is this what your government considers respecting taxpayers money?

**Jaclyn Symes:** On a point of order, President, I am just pointing out that Mr Mulholland's question should be directed to the Minister for Public Transport. When departments engage consultants, it is a matter for ministers within that department and their various responsibilities. The Minister for Finance would not be responsible for those contracts.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Mulholland, would you be happy to refer it to PT?

**Evan Mulholland:** On the point of order, President, this is an announcement that the minister actually made today and has spoken on today. It is in a government media release, so it is therefore

entirely within his portfolio. If he, according to official government media releases, has responsibility for consultants and trimming back consultants and speaking on consultants, then surely it is firmly within the purview of the Minister for Finance, given he has already been speaking on it, to answer questions on it.

**The PRESIDENT:** I take Minister Symes's point of order, and I have said before that a member has a right to ask any minister a question as they see fit, and the minister may give an answer if it is not inside their remit. That is the answer, but I will put the question to the minister.

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:10): I thank Mr Mulholland for that question. I do agree with Minister Symes that substantively the question is addressed to the Minister for Public Transport, but as the Minister for Finance and insofar as it relates to my portfolios I will say that it is another demonstration of the new direction under Premier Carroll and his commitment to frugal fiscal management. We have a fiscal plan. We are the only jurisdiction that is running surplus budgets, and we are doing it whilst committing to and supporting infrastructure spend, including a range of rail and road and hospital infrastructure.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** Ms Crozier, you know the new Frankston Hospital and Footscray Hospital are world-class hospitals. These are the kinds of investments that our government is committed to doing, and we are doing that because of our sound fiscal management. And I did make an announcement on behalf of the Premier this morning about a commitment to further making up to \$70 million in savings from consultants, but those consultants are the responsibility of each respective department. As Minister for Finance I am proud of that disciplined approach that we are taking, and I support that. So I was proud to announce that on behalf of the Premier.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:11): Minister, given reports that VicTrack recently spent an eye-watering \$187,000 on an external job hunt, only to end up appointing an internal candidate, do the government consulting cuts also include ludicrous executive search contracts?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:12): I thank Mr Mulholland for the supplementary question. I think the Premier has been quite clear. He has written to all the ministers. If you could see his press release today – I am sure you check the Premier's press releases regularly – he has been very clear in his expectation that there needs to be a more sensitive approach. We respect taxpayer dollars – every dollar counts. And whether that be on unnecessary office expenditure, like artwork, like plaques, the Premier has been clear on his direction, and expenditure on consultants is one of them. We know we have already taken significant steps, but we are going to go even further. A further \$70 million worth of savings will be made. We are going to be backing our public service –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, on relevance, President, I did ask whether the government's consulting cuts would also include ludicrous executive search contracts, and the minister has not yet answered that question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister has been relevant to his portfolio. Minister, if you would like to continue.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** President, I will take your guidance. That is right; I think the questions about specific portfolio expenditures, and you gave a specific entity there, would be for the responsible minister in that portfolio. But as the finance minister I was proud to announce the Premier's guidance to all ministers, and all departments in fact, that we need to be more prudent with the use of external experts. We are backing our public service, who are experts in the field and will be supporting us.

**Economic policy**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): (1454) My question is also for the Minister for Finance. You have said in your press release this morning that you will target a \$70 million reduction in spending on consultants and external advisers in actual terms, cash terms. How much of that \$70 million will be achieved before the election?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:14): I think I was very clear at the press conference that these are for the forward estimates, so they are for the 2027–28 and 2028–29 financial years.

**Richard Welch:** On a point of order, President, I would be very, very worried if the Minister for Finance does not know the difference between cash and accrual accounting. I did not ask a question about the accruals; I asked a question about the actuals.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister was relevant to the question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I think it is best if we formalise it rather than asking questions and answers informally the way that just happened then.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:15): Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Let us just be clear, everyone: there are no savings before the election. This is something they might do next term, if you can trust that. Or they might have a change of position; you never know. Minister, you also state that you will cease new expenditure on non-essential items, including branded apparel, merchandise for internal staff use and bronze plaques for politicians. Does that include a bronze statue for Daniel Andrews?

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister can answer as he sees fit.

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:15): Sorry, Mr Welch. I am sorry to disappoint. I do not have an announcement regarding that statue, but that is not a priority for our government. We are focused on delivering the frontline services that Victorians rely on and giving cost-of-living relief. That is our focus.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ministers statements: pill testing**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:16): I rise to update the house on how our government's pill-testing service is saving lives and reducing drug harms for all Victorians. We are seeing a significant increase in drug harms, with the drug market increasingly volatile and a rise in dangerous synthetic substances. Our Victorian pill-testing service is an important part of our efforts to reduce these harms. Since we opened the fixed site in Fitzroy one year ago more than 3000 Victorians have accessed this service, with almost 40 per cent saying it was the first time they had spoken to a health professional about their drug use. More than 5000 drug samples have been tested, with more than 2500 conversations held between service users and our experienced harm reduction workers, highlighting the strong demand across the community for trusted, non-judgemental health advice.

The intelligence gathered from this service is also helping to strengthen Victoria's current drug surveillance efforts. Around 12 per cent of samples tested contained an unexpected psychoactive substance with the potential to cause serious harm. The fixed site has issued 28 drug notifications warning the community about dangerous substances, including two urgent alerts for nitazenes. We know that no drug is ever truly safe, but Victorians deserve to have all the information possible to help them make better, safer and more informed decisions.

The evidence behind pill testing is clear: it saves lives and reduces harm. On this side of the chamber we know that pill testing is absolutely about saving lives, on this side of the chamber we are committed to this service, but what about those opposite? They voted against this life-saving service, and they have said that they will shut it down the first chance that they get.

### Game hunting

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:18): (1455) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Minister, the Victorian government has previously commissioned important research into the economic contribution of recreational hunting, with studies based on the 2013 and 2019 hunting years. The most recent published survey found that recreational hunting by Victorian game licence holders contributed an estimated \$356 million to Victoria's gross state product and supported 3138 full-time equivalent jobs, with 69 per cent of expenditure occurring in regional Victoria. Earlier this year the government commissioned a new study with BDO and Action Market Research surveying Victorian game licence holders. The research closed on 8 March 2026, and the updated report is eagerly anticipated by Victoria's hunting community and other stakeholders interested in the contribution hunting makes to regional economies. Can the minister provide an update on the progress of the study and advise when the final report is expected to be released?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:19): I thank Mr Bourman for his question and, at the outset, his interest in outdoor activities and particularly identifying the physical and mental health benefits of such activities. We do want those numbers to be higher and higher. We want to promote more activities outdoors. I am certainly committed to doing that in the portfolio responsibility of the Minister for Environment. In relation to the report that you referred to, please let me endeavour to seek an update on the status of it.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:19): I thank the minister, and I eagerly look forward to the update. Building on this growing evidence in recognising the contribution recreational hunting makes to regional Victoria, will the minister work with hunting organisations, regional communities, tourism bodies and other relevant stakeholders to develop a Victorian game hunting tourism strategy to grow the economic and tourism benefits of sustainable recreational hunting in Victoria?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:20): I thank Mr Bourman for his supplementary question. Of course the visitor economy that is based on nature-based tourism is increasing year on year. I think it is around \$5 billion at last assessment. I know that the new body, Fishing, Hunting and Outdoor Victoria, will have an important role in growing participation in outdoor recreation and supporting development in the sector. I think there are many of us that agree that outdoor activities are fantastic for regional economies, and there is always the opportunity to create further growth in this sector. Your question is probably a little more relevant to the minister for tourism, but obviously through previous roles and connections I have a lot of relationships with the existing regional tourism bodies. I will be having conversations more broadly about outdoor activities, hiking, access to parks and the like, so some of your feedback would be very valuable for that.

**Ballarat Base Hospital**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (12:22): (1456) My question is to the Minister for Health. Laura, a former nurse who has since resigned from the Ballarat Base Hospital, wrote to the government last week, and I want to quote from her letter. She said:

Imagine lying in an ED corridor for days. Imagine having no privacy, no dignity and no sense of safety. Imagine feeling like you do not matter. Imagine knowing the nurses caring for you are exhausted, overwhelmed and terrified of making a mistake because they are stretched beyond human limits. This is what our patients endure. This is what nurses endure. This is what you have allowed to continue.

Minister, will you establish an investigation into the Ballarat Base Hospital to improve patient care?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:23): I thank Mr McCracken for his question. I know that our nurses do an incredible job and sometimes it is very challenging work. I do want to acknowledge that particular nurse's experience and also thank her for the care that she has been providing to the Ballarat community. I think it was something that Ms Crozier actually referenced when we were in the committee stage of the nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratio bill earlier this week. I do absolutely acknowledge the extraordinary work that our nurses do right across the health system – indeed all our health workforce.

Of course, like health systems around the country, we are seeing unprecedented demand in our emergency departments. It is certainly not unique to Victoria. It is something that has been experienced in other jurisdictions as well. It is why we are continuing to work with our health services through our timely emergency care program to get patients out of our emergency departments and into the right care sooner. It is why our government has been proud to increase our workforce by more than 40,000 people over the past decade, and our nurse retention is now one of the strongest in the nation.

Of course there is always more work to be done. We are investing in alternative care pathways, including the virtual emergency department, Nurse-on-Call and other important programs.

**Joe McCracken:** On a point of order, President, my question was very specific to the Ballarat Base Hospital and the conditions there. I ask you to draw the minister back to the question, please.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister will come to the question.

**Ingrid STITT:** I was being relevant to the issues that you were raising on behalf of that particular nurse, and I was actually about to touch on the issues at Ballarat Base Hospital. These are questions that have also come up in the last couple of sitting weeks. It is important to note that we are significantly investing in improving our services and the infrastructure at Ballarat with a \$655 million redevelopment of the Ballarat Base Hospital. That is one of the biggest regional health infrastructure investments that we have ever made in Victoria. Importantly for the workforce in Ballarat, it includes a new emergency department with the capacity for an additional 100 inpatients and short-stay beds.

**Joe McCracken:** On a point of order, President, I have been listening very patiently to the minister. The question was specifically: will you investigate the conditions at Ballarat Base Hospital? The minister has not gone near that.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the minister has been relevant to the question.

**Ingrid STITT:** Before Mr McCracken's point of order I was going on to say that we will continue to work closely with Grampians Health and health services across the state to make sure that our patients across the state actually receive safe, timely care and that our health workforce is supported to deliver it. We have a performance management system of our health services that is regularly undertaken by the department, and that is the appropriate way to handle these matters.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (12:26): I want to quote again from Laura's letter:

Right now we feel abandoned. We feel unheard. We feel like we do not matter to the people who make decisions about our working conditions and patient safety. And because we cannot perform the way we know we can, the Ballarat community is losing faith in us. That loss of trust is devastating. We did not fail them. The system all failed us.

Minister, Laura is one of dozens of nurses who are telling you there is an issue, and you have not categorically said that you will investigate it. In fact you have refused to even respond to that part of the question. Why won't you release the latest People Matter survey that talks about these very important issues?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:27): I thank the member for his supplementary question. I have acknowledged the issues that have been raised by Laura and also acknowledged that our nurses right across the health system do an incredible job, and sometimes under very challenging circumstances. We have a very robust system in place for performance management across the health system. That is the appropriate way in which any issues ought to be surfaced and dealt with. But what I have gone to in the answer to the substantive question are all of the additional supports that the government is providing through investment and programs that are all about alleviating the pressure on emergency departments.

**Georgie Crozier**: On a point of order, President, there are 7 seconds left. Mr McCracken's question was very specific: why won't the minister release the latest People Matter survey?

**The PRESIDENT**: I believe the minister was being relevant to the question.

**Ingrid STITT**: The People Matter survey is not a matter for me to release. It is a broader piece of work across the public sector.

#### **Ministers statements: toy libraries**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:29): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's support for toy libraries through our latest round of grants. Last week I was delighted to visit the Darebin Toy Library in Northcote alongside the member for Preston Nathan Lambert and the member for Northcote Kat Theophanous to celebrate their grant. Through these grants we have invested another \$360,000 into toy libraries across Victoria. This includes supporting another 46 toy libraries with grants of up to \$10,000 to buy new toys, attract new members and streamline lending, ensuring that these services can support as many families as possible.

This funding will also support the establishment of two new toy libraries, one in Ballarat and one in Wallan East. Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, BADAC, will open a toy library at Yirram Burron early learning in Sebastopol as well as operate a mobile service for families, and Kids First Wallan East kindergarten will also open a toy library in central Wallan. By supporting communities with new toy libraries, we are ensuring that more families are able to benefit from the cost-of-living support that they provide, and we are supporting the learning and development of our youngest Victorians.

Visiting the Darebin service was a wonderful opportunity to meet with staff from the City of Darebin, as well as Toy Libraries Australia, who provide fantastic support to toy libraries across Victoria. As someone who has previously volunteered at a toy library service, I know firsthand how important these services are, and it seems I am not the only one. Those opposite are happy to use toy libraries, they are happy to join toy libraries, they are even happy to take the credit when Labor funds them, but when those opposite have had the opportunity to actually fund toy libraries, suddenly playtime is over, because the last time those opposite were in government they failed to invest in these types of supports.

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, we have been here before: ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

**The PRESIDENT:** All it says is that a minister may make a statement. It does not determine what statement they make.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** While our government supports playtime, those opposite slash it. They slashed \$1 billion from education. Labor's \$1.9 million toy library grants program has delivered nine new toy libraries and supported more than 100 existing services to buy thousands of new toys. It is only a Labor government that supports these essential initiatives.

### Offshore wind energy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): (1457) My question is to the minister for energy. Minister, when will the Port of Hastings, the Carroll government's intended offshore wind assembly port, be completed and able to begin the assembly of offshore wind infrastructure?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:32): I thank Mr Davis for his question. You might have had the opportunity, like I did at the event on Wednesday night, to catch up with members of the Port of Hastings, who are really excited about the employment opportunities and future of that site. It is integral to ensuring that we have the right place for the construction and delivery of turbines that will complement the auction. The timelines with the Port of Hastings and the upgrade will work alongside our auction process and the start of the projects that are successful under that auction. These are things that are happening over the next couple of years, and I can continue to give you updates as they progress.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): I note that the Port of Hastings has many strengths, but the application to the EPBC was not a strength and was rejected by the federal government and caused massive delay. This is why I am asking. If the Port of Hastings offshore wind infrastructure is unable to be completed in time, what is the government's contingency plan – its plan B?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:33): Mr Davis, it sounds as though you are a champion for the failure of an amazing project. I still cannot work out what your position is on it. In terms of the port, it will be subject to completion of assessments and approvals. We expect offshore wind construction to commence in 2032, and we believe that the port will be completed by then. Talking to the port, members of the board and the CEO, everyone is committed to this project. We will work through the necessary approvals. As you will appreciate, there is a lot of work that has been going on in advance of the announcement of the auction. There is a lot of excitement in that part of the world. Mr McIntosh was the sponsor of an event that was highly attended by lots and lots of people from Gippsland in particular. This is an exciting project. It would be great if you just got behind it, because industry are actually very concerned about your lack of commitment to such an important project.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister seems to struggle to answer directly with a date or a timeline. And what is plan B? There was no mention of plan B.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order. The minister was relevant to the question.

### Medicinal cannabis

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:34): (1458) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. The Victorian government's *Medicinal Cannabis Industry Development Plan* aims to supply half of Australia's medicinal cannabis market by 2028. However, Invest Victoria's website shows limited grants programs and still leads to a page that has no information to support the government's development plan for this industry. Medicinal cannabis is one of the fastest growing

industries worldwide, with a projected compound annual growth rate of 16 per cent. The medicinal cannabis industry is growing rapidly, and Victoria should be leading, not leaving businesses behind. It is time for the government to turn its industry plan into action. We need a clear pathway for businesses to access investment grants, research partnerships, infrastructure support and export assistance. Can the minister please advise how the government is supporting the growth of the medicinal cannabis industry in Victoria.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:35): I thank Ms Payne for her question, and I will refer it for an answer accordingly.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:36): I thank the minister for referring it on. According to the Office of Drug Control, approximately only 25 per cent of cannabis is produced in Australia, in comparison to medicinal cannabis that is imported from countries such as Canada and Thailand. This highlights a significant challenge for cultivators and manufacturers in Victoria. While the Victorian government has ambitions to develop a strong domestic medicinal cannabis industry, local businesses are competing in a market where imported products can benefit from large-scale overseas cultivation and production. Would the minister commit to meeting with the Victorian medicinal cannabis cultivators to hear directly about the barriers they face and work with them to progress the implementation of the government's *Medicinal Cannabis Industry Development Plan*?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:36): Again I thank Ms Payne for her question for the Minister for Agriculture. In accordance with the standing orders I will refer it on.

#### Ministers statements: economic policy

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:37): The Carroll Labor government respects every single taxpayer dollar. That means running a prudent government behind the scenes so we can deliver first-rate frontline services that everyday Victorians rely on. We have delivered this whilst running the only operating surplus on the eastern seaboard.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! The minister to continue.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** We have delivered an operating surplus – the only state on the eastern seaboard to do so. But good government never stops looking for better value, and that is why we are taking three further steps that were announced today by the Premier. First, we are targeting a \$70 million reduction in spending on consultants and external advisers, because we are backing our public service; we know how capable and hardworking they are. Where expertise already exists within government, taxpayers should not have to pay twice. Consultants will still of course have a role, especially where their specialist expertise is needed or there is a surge capacity that is required – of course they will. Secondly, the Premier has directed ministers to stop new discretionary spending on non-essential items, such as branded merchandise for internal staff, artwork and bronze plaques. Third, we will implement two further recommendations of the Silver review by winding up the standalone Infrastructure Victoria and Economic Growth Victoria. Our work in infrastructure and economic growth will continue; the duplication will end. Together with bringing the Suburban Rail Loop Authority into the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, these reforms will reduce the number of public entities and boards by 29. These decisions protect frontline services, reduce unnecessary spending and support our fiscal strategy to stabilise and reduce debt as a share of the economy. That is what it means when we say respecting the taxpayer dollar, trusting our public servants, stripping out duplication –

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I know those opposite cannot actually see that we have a gallery full of children here watching this behaviour right now, but what I want to say –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja Terpstra:** You are showing your best behaviour. What I was going to say is I am sitting behind the minister and I actually cannot hear a word that the minister is saying. The constant interjections coming from those opposite are unruly, and you should call the house to order.

**The PRESIDENT:** I call the house to order.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** This is what it means to respect the taxpayer dollar, trust our public servants, strip out the duplication and focus spending where it matters most. This is a new direction under Premier Carroll.

### **Vets for Compassion**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:39): (1459) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Almost a year ago Vets for Compassion came to my office concerned about a change by the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria clarifying that non-vet darters must now have a vet physically present to supervise them when darting wildlife. For several years telehealth was considered an appropriate form of direct supervision for darting operations. The change has resulted in distressed and injured animals being left in avoidable suffering, waiting for a vet to be physically present, despite these responders having successfully performed this work for decades. This change has caused increased pressure on the already stretched volunteer wildlife rescue sector, created additional public safety risks and resulted in animals experiencing prolonged suffering. Will the minister provide a solution to ensure that Vets for Compassion can continue their life-saving darting work?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:40): I thank Ms Purcell for her question. I am aware of the amazing work that this group undertake at times, particularly when there are road accidents, and I think particularly regional Victorians acknowledge the important work that they do because we see it firsthand. These qualified volunteers I know are available at short notice. They are very passionate people, and they certainly deserve our respect and assistance as much as possible. The issue you have raised is something that I am seeking advice about. Two health ministers that I know of have both had a little bit of involvement in it as well. I understand that there have been some discussions around some protocols for volunteers. I am seeking further advice on that, and I am very happy to share that as soon as it is available.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Across the chamber! Mr McIntosh, you are heading for an early shower. Ms Purcell is not interjecting. She wants to hear the answer, so can the chamber respect that.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Sorry, Ms Purcell. I am not even sure what those interjections were. But talking to you directly, there is input from DEECA, input from Health. You have asked me to seek a solution. I think bringing that together is part of the start of that, and I am more than happy to update you as that progresses.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:42): Thank you very much for that, Minister. I understand it is a very messy scenario. I notice Ms Shing is nodding her head too. A broader problem across the wildlife rescue sector is a lack of clarity and government support for those undertaking essential emergency response work, particularly now with the rise of H5 bird flu in our state. Vets for Compassion have come to my office also seeking clarity on the role they can play in responding to H5 bird flu, including deploying trained volunteers to access areas affected by mortality events, assisting with the safe removal of deceased and infected wildlife and providing PPE and biosecurity training to responders to prevent further spread. Vets for Compassion are ready and able to assist with this emergency response, but they need clear guidance from the government on how they can safely support the response. Will the minister engage with Vets for Compassion to establish a clear response

protocol for bird flu and ensure their trained volunteers can be appropriately deployed for support in this emergency alongside the department and government?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:43): Thank you so much, Ms Purcell. H5 bird flu is obviously an issue that is concerning for a lot of people, and there are a lot of agencies, whether they are within government or outside of government, in relation to the volunteers that are really committed to making sure that we do the very best to respond to this unfolding emergency effectively. What we have is the emergency animal disease hotline as well as advice in relation to biosecurity requirements. I recently announced more funding for wildlife volunteers to make sure that they have the available PPE. There are a lot of online meetings and briefings that are underway. I am not sure if Vets for Compassion have been engaged in those. If they have not, I would be more than happy to link that up. I am more than happy to seek further advice in relation to this specific organisation in relation to the work that has been undertaken and some of the work that may be needed going forward. If they are not looped in, I am very happy to make efforts to ensure that they feel that they are being well supported and getting the information they need.

### **Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:44): (1460) My question is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Minister, on Tuesday my colleague Ms Copey asked how accepting free tickets and hospitality from Crown, Tabcorp and Endeavour Group was consistent with the ministerial code of conduct. One of the defences you provided was that this is necessary so-called stakeholder engagement. But the real stakeholders are those who have experienced gambling harm, and they cannot afford to provide expensive tickets and hospitality. As I understand it, you have met with the gambling harm Lived Experience Advisory Committee only once during your term as minister, in July last year, and despite personally committing to meet with them regularly and keep them updated on gambling reforms, you have done neither, but you have regularly met with gambling corporations and accepted free tickets and hospitality from them on numerous occasions. In reality they are buying continual access. Minister, why do gambling corporations repeatedly get your time while the Lived Experience Advisory Committee gets one meeting and broken promises?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:45): I reject the premise of the question. As minister I meet with a large range of stakeholders across my portfolios. As you would understand, as minister there are over 100 committees that report to me, and I regularly get briefed by my department on those as many of those committees are under the auspices of departments that regularly report up to the minister. It is not possible, but I wish I could attend every single committee that reports to me on a regular basis. That is my wish, but as we know, there is only limited time to be able to engage with stakeholders. I will always be accessible where possible.

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**Enver ERDOGAN**: I will take that interjection, Mr McGowan. Wildlife Victoria was one that you raised, and I met with them. I will meet with stakeholders where I can. There is always more work to be done. I do get regularly briefed on their work, and I want to thank them for their work. Lived experience is a crucial part of policy formulation. Under the Carroll Labor government we will continue to engage and continue to make improvements. We will continue to have discussions with federal counterparts too, so I want to thank them for their engagement. I will continue to do that work.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:46): I am not quite sure the minister answered that question. A further defence, Minister, that you provided on Tuesday regarding your acceptance of these gifts was that you had complied with your obligations by disclosing them. The code is explicit. Disclosure is one obligation under section 5.1.1 of the ministerial code. But separately from disclosure, section 5.1.4 says that a minister must not accept gifts or hospitality that could reasonably give rise to a conflict of interest or be perceived as an inducement or reward in the exercise of official functions.

The Premier has said integrity is not optional, and under the code enforcement is a matter for the Premier. Minister, have you asked the Premier to determine whether your acceptance of these benefits complied with section 5.1.4 of the ministerial code, and if not, why not?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:47): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question. Dr Mansfield, I am not sure where this line of questioning is going. If you have an allegation to make, I would say make it by way of substantive motion. I think this is a line of questioning that is quite unfortunate and really unproductive, and quite hurtful to be frank. I am someone that takes my roles very seriously and acts with integrity and proper process. I always make the appropriate disclosures. I always act appropriately. I think the Premier has been asked and has answered in relation to this question. But in relation to my conduct, the ministerial code of conduct is clear. It expressly permits ministers to accept reasonable hospitality and customary official gifts because engagement with businesses, community organisations and stakeholders is a legitimate part of ministerial official responsibilities. Most of the events I attend are, to be honest, at local community groups, sporting clubs and faith communities in my electorate. I see some of these people and I see Mr Mulholland at some of those events. I see many of the members in this chamber at those events. That is where the majority of my time is spent. Stakeholder engagement with industry is an important part of that and one small component of the broader engagement I am committed to doing as a minister of the Crown.

#### **Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:48): Thank you for the opportunity for the last Friday ministers statement. Victorians deserve the cheapest and most efficient energy possible. For decades Victoria has relied on gas as a cheap and reliable source of energy, but we know – I think I heard Mr McIntosh talking about it today – that gas supply from Bass Strait is declining and it is no longer the cheapest or most reliable option for Victorian households and businesses. In fact the independent market operator, AEMO, predicts gas peak shortfalls by 2030. That is why the government has needed to step in. We are protecting gas supply for the industries that genuinely need it while helping households and businesses make the switch to electric, because for most Victorians electrification means cheaper, safer and more efficient energy. We are doing it fairly and sensibly. We have worked with stakeholders to design electrification reforms. We are giving people time to adjust, and we have built in commonsense exemptions where electrification is not practical.

Let us be absolutely clear about what the reforms do not do. There are no changes to gas cooktops in homes with an existing connection. There are no changes to existing commercial sites, including pubs and restaurants. If you own an apartment where hot water is supplied by a centralised system, you do not need to switch. Those opposite say they care about choice, but what they have made very clear is that they do not. They will rip that choice away. Victorians will have no choice but to pay higher prices and face increased risk of blackouts as the Liberals drain our remaining gas supplies. The Liberals will have no choice but to overturn their ban on fracking to supply enough gas to generate electricity and supply households and businesses. I am not quite sure how the Nats are going to explain that coalition to farmers. It is only Labor that will keep energy bills low, protect gas for the industries that need it and deliver the renewable energy that Victoria needs.

#### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:50): I thank Minister Blandthorn, who will get answers from the Minister for Agriculture for both questions from Ms Payne, within the standing orders.

*Constituency questions*

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:51): (2568) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. Constituents across eastern Victoria, including local timber workers, landowners and regional communities, are deeply invested in the development and management of the plantation forestry estate in Gippsland. Victoria has a nation-leading plantation sector with thousands of jobs, and it supplies timber to our building and manufacturing workforces and draws down millions of tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. My question to the minister is: Minister, how is the Victorian government supporting the long-term security of the plantation estate in eastern Victoria?

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2569) My constituency question is to the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, and it relates to significant community concern over the planned Campbellfield data centre in my electorate. A number of constituents have reached out to my office and walked into my office, sharing strong concerns over the environmental and local amenity impacts associated with the construction and operation of the proposed data centre facility. Data centres are essential to Victoria's future; I note the protest for this data centre was even made with AI. However, like any industrial process, they should be located in appropriate industrial areas and be subject to proper and meaningful planning and community consultation. Personally, I am not of the belief that the government has got the balance right. Similar to the waste-to-energy inquiry, you have got the government fast-tracking data centres and their own candidates and MPs campaigning against them. Many residents in Campbellfield and Broadmeadows feel that their views have not been adequately addressed. My question to the minister is: what is being done to ensure the concerns of local residents and council are being properly considered?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (2570) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Koala breeding season is fast approaching, and koalas will be increasingly on the move. This includes areas surrounding the Calder Freeway in Macedon and Woodend, where koalas continue to be struck and killed by vehicles. Wildlings Woodend Wildlife Shelter is no stranger to responding to injured koalas at all times of the day and all throughout the night. Sadly, more often than not, they are left to euthanise koalas suffering catastrophic injuries. The shelter has repeatedly sought confirmation about whether fencing along the Calder Freeway will be maintained, but they have been unable to obtain a response. Given the known presence of koalas along this corridor, will the minister commit to maintaining the wildlife fencing along the Calder Freeway and also trialling electronic wildlife warning signage during periods of heightened koala movement?

**Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:54): (2571) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A 6-kilometre stretch of the Western Highway, eastbound from Gordon, has had its speed limit slashed from 110 kilometres per hour to just 60 because the road has been allowed to deteriorate so badly. This is no isolated pothole or temporary reduction over a few hundred metres; it is 6 kilometres of one of Victoria's major passenger and freight routes. After receiving complaints from dozens of constituents, our outstanding Liberal candidate for Eureka Emma Muir inspected the stretch yesterday. She saw motorists forced to pull over with shredded tyres and rubber strewn across the road. Putting up 60 kilometre-per-hour signs is no substitute for properly maintaining a major highway. Minister, you promise money and maintenance but deliver media statements. When are you actually going to fix the roads?

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:55): (2572) My constituency question is for the minister responsible for transport and planning. Crossing guards need a range of skills to perform their role safely and effectively. It is a very social job which involves talking to members of the community. It requires a certain amount of bravery to step out in front of traffic with the hope that cars will stop. On Centre Dandenong Road in Moorabbin it also requires the niche skill of guiding pedestrians around pitfalls. On this road between Coolac Street and Avalon Court there are a series of potholes presenting a risk not just to motorists swerving to dodge them but also to the pedestrians who have to bound over them with the assistance of crossing guards. One of the larger potholes is right between the white lines of the pedestrian crossing. This creates added risk for pedestrians, including many children who attend school in the area. What is the government doing about the potholes on the middle of the pedestrian crossing on Centre Dandenong Road?

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (2573) My question is to the Minister for Health. Medical centres are struggling to meet demand, and the Cove Family Medical Centre in Patterson Lakes is doing critical work. Doctors from this clinic provide vaccinations to nursing homes in metro and regional areas, including as far away as Nar Nar Goon and Koo Wee Rup in regional communities. But the clinic has been battling a GP shortage for years. In Victoria demand for health care is growing faster than the available GP workforce. For over three years the clinic has been advocating for more doctors so they can continue providing essential medical care to vulnerable communities. But this government continues to dismiss their needs and ignores their need to support GPs in Victoria. Minister, what incentives will you implement to increase the number of GPs at this clinic and others so Victorians in vulnerable areas can receive critical medical services?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:57): (2574) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Children, and my constituents ask what the government is doing to ensure the continuation of kindergarten services for the children of Hopetoun and Beulah after the Hopetoun kindergarten was severely damaged by a burst water pipe. For more than two years the families of Hopetoun and Beulah have been without a long day care service. They were on the brink of getting this service back, combined with kindergarten services, when through no fault of their own the building was declared unsafe after extensive water damage, mould and structural deterioration were discovered. While kindergarten programs have been temporarily relocated to the Hopetoun senior citizens centre, this location is far from ideal. I have already raised the hardship that the Beulah community is facing from inadequate kindergarten facilities, and now this is causing them more stress and anxiety around the future of their kindergarten services. Minister, the children of Hopetoun and Beulah deserve adequate and continuous kindergarten services, and my constituents want to know how you will ensure they are delivered.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (2575) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. For drivers across Banyule and Nillumbik in my electorate, the Civic Drive roundabout is a daily bottleneck and a longstanding safety concern, and it has not been for a little while; it has been for years and years and years. This is a real problem. More than 25,000 vehicles pass through that intersection at Diamond Creek Road already, and it is going to be many, many more when the North East Link opens up in 2028. There is no plan to address it. The local member for Bundoora has shown no interest in addressing it. The Liberal candidate for Bundoora Chris Parr has been advocating strongly that this gets addressed for the constituents of Bundoora. The question I ask is: will the minister commit to delivering the upgrade needed for the Civic Drive roundabout before North East Link opens in 2028?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2576) We have seen in recent days the revelation of a secret tax on every ticket fare in the state: every bus, every tram, every train and every regional train. The Premier, although he seems to have been deeply part of the genesis of this, now says he is going to tear that up. Well, the problem is they have been collecting the fare tax – the special, secret fare tax – since 1 January 2025. I would like him to tell me how much has been collected in my electorate of Southern Metro. Further – and this could be for the Minister for Public Transport, but it appears the Premier is so intimately involved he may know more – what I would seek from the transport minister is: how much has been collected, and will it be paid back?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (2577) My question is to the minister for natural disaster recovery. Northern Victoria Region has experienced floods, droughts, storms and fires in recent years, and many residents have highlighted the need for government support to enable their communities to recover – places like Rochester after the floods and Harcourt after the fires. Each event is assessed against the Commonwealth–state disaster recovery funding arrangements, and depending on the severity of the disaster, the Commonwealth can provide additional recovery funding and reimburse up to 75 per cent of financial assistance to the states. The Commonwealth government recently announced that they are introducing new disaster recovery funding arrangements which they say are simpler and fairer. They propose to change the current arrangements to equal funding with the states, 50–50. This may be because they have a trillion-dollar debt. It is worth noting the Commonwealth government collect about 80 per cent of tax revenue; state governments, less than 17 per cent; and local governments, 3 per cent. Minister, what representations have the Victorian government made to the Commonwealth to ensure that Victoria, local councils and our regional communities do not end up paying a greater share of disaster recovery costs because of these proposed changes?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (2578) My question is for the Minister for Education. Will the minister allocate dedicated funding to carry out maintenance at Tylden Primary and other public schools in the Macedon electorate? When Premier Ben Carroll was Minister for Education, he allowed schools in the Macedon electorate to fall into disrepair, with 50 per cent of schools assessed as being in poor condition. Tylden Primary School demonstrates what Labor's chronic underinvestment in regional school infrastructure looks like. The school has to cover basic maintenance through locally raised funds, and money that should be going towards student learning has to be spent on painting and safety works. The fantastic Liberal candidate for Macedon Kate Kendall visited Tylden Primary and was shocked to see the poor physical condition of the buildings, which is disrupting the education and wellbeing of students and staff. Children at Tylden Primary and all schools in the Macedon electorate deserve clean and safe classrooms and school grounds where they can focus on learning.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:02): (2579) Minister Symes, last weekend I was fortunate enough to visit Bronhill Road reserve. It is a little park in Ringwood East in my electorate, as you may be aware. There are 150 local residents. This was born from the local community and their concern for the fact that Maroondah council are currently seeking to sell that site. You heard me correctly: they are trying to sell a public park, a park used by children currently. I would ask you to join with me in approaching the Minister for Local Government to immediately apply an overlay on that property to restrict its use to ensure that it can only be used as a public park. As you and I both know, our public parks are absolutely critical, especially for the environment, because they provide important tree canopy, which is critical in our area, particularly given we have lost so much through both the Suburban Rail Loop project and the North East Link project. But in addition to that,

there is increased density that is planned for our area. And if that were not important enough, it is also critical for our children to be able to play and our families to be able to have a public open space and to enjoy this beautiful park for ever more and not have it sold from underneath us.

### *Bills*

#### **Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (VEET Strategic Review and Other Matters) Bill 2026**

#### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed.**

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (32):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

*Noes (4):* Jeff Bourman, Moira Deeming, David Limbrick, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Committed.**

#### *Committee*

#### **Clause 1 (13:11)**

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I have got a number of questions. If it is okay, I will ask them all on clause 1. They are fairly general in nature anyway. Minister, what kinds of new activities is the government considering for inclusion within the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program – for example, demand management technologies, EV charging infrastructure, new forms of insulation, information- or data-based activities, home solar? Are you able to give some further detail on that?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** As you have identified, the bill does not introduce new activities to the VEU program. New activities are introduced through a formal government process mandated by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). The process involves public stakeholder consultations, analysis and regulatory processes to define baseline requirements and administrative set-up undertaken by the Essential Services Commission (ESC). I am very happy to take on board suggestions to get advice et cetera. This is a process that will be undertaken after the bill is set up. This is an architecture bill, and I know there is a lot of interest in what this could facilitate.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** You partially answered this question, but does the government have any plans in the foreseeable future to introduce any of these new VEU activities or begin any consultation on introducing them?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Certainly consultation is to be undertaken. Also, importantly, you do not know what you do not know yet in relation to emerging technologies and things that will be of interest to consumers to reduce their power bills, reduce their emissions and perhaps provide other benefits to their houses and businesses, so I am very open to having lots of ideas brought forward.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Is the government considering any improvements to new or existing VEU activities for apartment buildings – specifically for upgrading centralised building services like central hot water to heat pump products?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** In answer to your question about apartment buildings, we want to give thought to the ability for broader cohorts of people to access the VEU and not be limited by the fact that they might be on shared systems and the like. We have certainly started to do some thinking about that, because we think that everyone should have access, but there are some complexities in a group of people as opposed to an individual. But they are things that I am very keen to work through.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Is the government considering any new targeted activity measures to support vulnerable cohorts, such as renters, poorer households or culturally and geographically diverse communities? If so, are you able to provide some details?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The bill does not introduce any new targeted activity measures. It provides greater flexibility, though, for government to consider targeted intervention where doing so is a cost-effective way to deliver the objectives of the bill. The bill allows the program to respond to changing consumer and energy system needs over time. They could be used to address equality by scaling the incentive applied for a particular cohort of energy users – certainly interested in the renter cohort.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I look forward to some of that work progressing. With respect to the activity orders scheme, what does a standard timeline look like for making an order for a new VEU activity? That is, when does a minister consider a new activity, what kind of briefings and consultations are required and when would they next make a decision for an activity order?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The levels of consultation traditionally undertaken when developing a new VEU activity are unchanged with this bill. Consultation with industry is obviously essential in ensuring activity requirements are robust and practical. The change from having activity requirements set in regulations to having activity requirements set in activity orders will save time in administrative and procedural ways. Given those time savings, it is estimated that a new activity could be introduced to the program in approximately half the time currently taken, which can generally be 12 months depending on the complexity.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** In terms of those orders, do they consider activity value, activity economics, product supply or workforce capacity? Can you give any more information about that?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** These factors will be considered in the same way as has traditionally been the case when introducing an activity by amendment to the regulations. Consultation with industry is essential in ensuring the activity requirements are robust and practical, and detailed economic analysis is essential in establishing confidence that incentivising an activity through the program makes sense, is workable and does not have any adverse impacts. Nothing in the bill changes the VEU program's approach to those measures.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Is the government currently planning or considering any future activity orders?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Any of those would be subject to future government decisions.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Can the government explain what the bill means for determining future eligibility criteria under the VEU?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The bill establishes new objects to illustrate the range of benefits that may be incentivised under the program beyond direct greenhouse gas emissions reductions, including supporting energy affordability, equitable access to energy upgrades, electrification and flexible demand technology. It does not provide a methodology for determining the value of VEU activities in the bill. For any new activity proposed for inclusion, questions such as whether additional benefits should be recognised and how those benefits should be reflected through activity design settings are matters for future decisions. The reforms do provide the flexibility for future activities to be assessed according to their specific characteristics and the outcomes that they can deliver, consistent with the purpose of the objectives of the act.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Just for clarity, what sort of evidence would the government expect to be required to determine potential new environmental, economic or social values?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Things that could be included, but obviously are not limited to, would be the expected impacts on energy affordability and consumer bills; costs and benefits for consumers, businesses and the broader energy system; emission reduction outcomes; impacts on system reliability, flexibility or demand management; market readiness and technology maturity; and stakeholder and industry feedback.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** How would those new values then be weighted when it comes to certificate creation?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The bill does not seek to prescribe how different types of benefits would be measured, weighted or reflected in future activities. That would be considered in the context of a particular activity. For any future activity, questions around whether additional benefits should be recognised and how those benefits should be reflected in incentive levels would be something that would be up for consideration, and any future decisions would be informed by appropriate evidence, analysis and definitely consultation, ensuring that the incentive levels remain proportionate and that they are cost-effective in a way that delivers the objects of the act. There will be industry representatives hoping to engage in consultation processes associated with the development of any new activity by sharing their views on activity parameters.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I might just move to another aspect of the bill. It introduces powers for ministerial intervention to manage certificate price volatility and scheme stability. Can you provide any information on the kinds of thresholds that might be required to trigger a ministerial intervention?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The bill does not prescribe the specific thresholds that would trigger the use of a target adjustment order. Those details will be developed through future amendments to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Regulations 2018, which will involve a regulatory impact statement, and that would be released for public comment. The government's intention is that any thresholds would be clear, simple, transparent and linked to sustained material departures from the market conditions that inform target setting rather than normal market fluctuations. Again, this would be subject to consultation with stakeholders.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I imagine it is a similar response to how demand settings are going to be adjusted through a ministerial intervention.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Yes. Again, it does not prescribe it in the bill, but the intent is where an intervention is required it would operate by increasing or decreasing the VEU target for a given year to rebalance the market in extreme circumstances, such as a sustained certificate, scarcity or unusually high prices.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** The bill requires the Essential Services Commission to establish a public register of people who, following an order under section 24 of the Gas Industry Act 2001, are exempt from having to obtain a distribution or retail licence. Can you summarise the kinds of people or entities you expect will be included on the register and what sorts of details will be provided?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** A gas-exempt person is anyone who is distributing or selling gas by retail using an order under section 24 of the Gas Industry Act instead of needing to obtain a licence to engage in those activities. Unlike the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the GIA does not include provisions for a register of exempt persons or require providers relying on an exemption to register with the ESC. This is problematic because it means that the ESC does not have sufficient oversight over who is relying on an exemption under the Gas Industry Act. Currently the gas-embedded networks exemption order allows gas-exempt persons to distribute gas within an embedded network without needing a licence to distribute gas. The gas embedded network exemption order does not exempt persons from the requirement to obtain a licence to sell gas to retail customers or to distribute gas in embedded networks

that started operating after 25 February 2025. These activities need a gas licence. Because the GIA does not yet include provision for a register of exempt persons, the gas embedded network exemption order could not include a registration requirement as a condition when it was made. This limits the transparency of gas-exempt persons using that mechanism.

The proposed amendment will mean that any future exemption order would be able to include a condition to require an exempt person to be registered once the gas register of exempt persons is established by the ESC. It is intended that the register would include the following information, in direct response to your question: the name of the registered person; the activity the registered person undertakes under an exemption; the date from which the exemption applying to the registered person is in force; whether the exemption applying to the registered person is in force; the prescribed particulars, if any; and other information which the ESC deems appropriate. The register is to be kept in the form and manner determined by the ESC.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** When do you expect the ESC will publish this register?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** It will be required to establish the register once the amendments have passed the Parliament. The relevant legislative provisions are proposed to come into operation on 2 October 2028.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** How will the ESC manage the inclusion or removal of new registered people?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** It will be an online process, with the expectation that details will be updated annually, and there is no cost to register.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I have just got one final question. We have heard concerns from some energy groups over new provisions in the bill regarding the recording and potential disclosure of certificate transfer prices. Can you explain what the new provisions could mean for the potential use or publication of trading data and any resulting impacts on commercial confidentiality, pricing transparency and market behaviour?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The bill introduces a new requirement for notifications of the transfer of certificates to include the price at which the certificates have been sold. These transfer prices will remain confidential and be held by the ESC. Any ESC reporting on market transactions will be retrospective at a high level of general market trends and certainly not in any form where specific transactions or participants can be identified. The reforms will support greater visibility of the certificate market for the regulator while avoiding impacts on commercial confidentiality or market participation. Any potential changes to the Victorian energy efficiency certificate account registry will be subject to further consultation with industry stakeholders.

**David DAVIS:** Minister, I had not intended to have this committee, but given we have got it, I will be brief and ask: formally, the strategic review undertaken by the department – will you release that?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I appreciate your question, Mr Davis, and I did listen to your contribution in the chamber. I am obviously new to the role. I am familiarising myself with the content of the review. When the scheme commenced, it was 17 years ago, so it was appropriate to have a look at it. Stakeholders have submitted the review in good faith, because they have provided a lot of constructive feedback, and at this point in time I am hoping to just get on with the legislation. I think we have the support of the chamber so that that can happen. I am not in a position to give you a commitment to that request today.

**David DAVIS:** My question would be: why not? This is now an older review – it is from back deep into the early part of 2025 – and there are submissions from stakeholders. I understand a few of those might be sensitive, but many may not and may just provide very useful information. Given that the government have now based two pieces of legislation on that review, at least in part, I think the community and the Parliament are entitled to see it.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** That is your view, Mr Davis. I have indicated, and you have indicated, that there might be some things in there that are not appropriate for public disclosure. As I said to you, I am new to the role, and I need to familiarise myself with the report. This is a piece of legislation that is really important, and it is a bit rich for you to say you want to see a report about something that I have never even supported. You have not provided any amendments. You have not provided any suggestions of improvements. You have been pretty passive in all of this, so I am not actually sure why you even care about a copy of the review.

**David DAVIS:** We put a documents motion back last year, actually.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** But in terms of your engagement on this particular program, it has been pretty lacklustre over 17 years. I have said to you that I am in a position where I would like to familiarise myself with the content of the review. You yourself have indicated that you have spoken to stakeholders who may not want their information made public.

**David DAVIS:** No, no-one has ever said that to me. I can conceive that there might be a legitimate case for saying that.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Well, apologies. I did not mean to verbal you. You and I both can concede that there may be stakeholders who in good faith participated in a process that at the time it was not said would be made public. When we have those situations, you have got to take due process before you release anything. As I said, I am going to familiarise myself with the report, and it should not hold up any of the legislation today.

**David DAVIS:** Leaving that aside, the question –

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, sorry, as it is now half past 1 –

**David DAVIS:** I will just make one point, if that is all right; I will just finish this. The minister could well release all or part of the document quite easily, and it would be in the public interest.

**Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 146 agreed to.**

**Reported to house without amendment.**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (13:30):  
I move:

That the report be now adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (13:30):  
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.

**Sitting suspended 1:31 pm until 2:03 pm.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to order of Council earlier this day.***Members***Gayle Tierney***Valedictory statement*

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria) (14:03): I would like to begin by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands across western Victoria, including the Gunditjmara, Eastern Maar, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wadawurrung and Wotjobaluk peoples. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future. Western Victoria is home to places of profound cultural significance, including the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. I am proud to have served in a Labor government committed to truth, treaty and self-determination and to advancing reconciliation with Victoria's First Peoples.

After 20 years as an elected representative and having decided not to contest the next election, it is naturally a time for reflection on the work, the people and the communities that have shaped those years. When I announced my decision in April I spoke about what an extraordinary privilege it has been to represent Western Victoria and how humbling and deeply rewarding it was to serve as a minister for nearly a decade. I said then that I was proud of what we had achieved. That pride has only grown as I have reflected on these past 20 years, particularly the lasting reforms we delivered and the relationships that have made it all possible. I was genuinely touched by the warmth and generosity of the response. The messages, the letters and the conversations brought back many memories and reminded me just how many people have been part of the journey.

The world, the way we communicate and the challenges facing our communities have all changed. But what has not changed is what matters most: staying connected to the people you represent, knowing what you stand for and working with others to make a practical difference. What has also not changed is the extraordinary support I have received from family, friends, colleagues and so many others over more than two decades. My main purpose today is a simple one: to reflect on what we have achieved and to thank the people who have supported me and worked alongside me.

I begin by thanking all of the incredible staff here at Parliament: Hansard, the chamber attendants, library, catering, security staff, the researchers, the clerks, the committee secretariats, and of course our cleaners. There are many others I would like to thank, and I thank each and every one of you for your professionalism, patience and good humour. Parliament is a workplace, but over time it becomes an extension of your family and friendship network. When someone is going through a difficult time, people quietly step forward and offer support without seeking recognition. I want to particularly give a big shout-out to Mark Culleton, who worked with me as a driver for seven years when I was cabinet secretary and most of the time that I was minister. Mark's professionalism was exceptional, but he was never simply the person that got me from point A to point B; he brought constant support, sound judgement and friendship through some of the busiest years of my working life. I also want to acknowledge Mark's wife Sonia, along with Anne Sargent, Keir Delaney, Greg Mills, Phil Stoits, Jacque Doolan and many others who have offered friendship and practical support over the years. You are truly valued and appreciated. There were times of great sadness too, particularly when we lost Russell and Nick. Those losses were deeply felt right across this building. That instinct to notice when someone needs a hand and simply step in is one of the things that I will remember most warmly about Parliament.

When I was first elected in 2006, my roommate, who is here, Kaye Darveniza, and I shared an office together those first couple of terms. Kaye understood the adjustment, the workload and the occasional absurdity of parliamentary life. Her friendship made those early years so much easier and certainly more enjoyable, especially through the enormous committee work that we undertook. And then there were the three amigos on the back bench together: Harriet Shing, Shaun Leane – President – and me.

Not a day went by that was not filled with a good belly laugh that helped carry us through the many long days and more than a few very, very late nights in this place.

To all of my government colleagues in the upper house, thank you for everything. The rallying that you do at all times of the day, the camaraderie and the sense of unity are nothing short of amazing. Nothing is ever too much or too hard in or outside of this chamber. Over these 20 years I have also had the privilege of serving under five Labor premiers: Steve Bracks, John Brumby, Dan Andrews, Jacinta Allan and Ben Carroll. Each has led our state in different times and circumstances, and each has brought their own strengths, values and style of leadership to the role. I thank them for their leadership, their support and the trust that they placed in me throughout my parliamentary and ministerial career. There are many others I want to acknowledge for their friendship, advice, leadership and support over the years. Many of them are in the gallery today. There are too many people to name individually, but please know that I have valued the advice, the humour and the shared determination to purely get things done.

Long before I entered this place, the union movement helped me develop my values framework and taught me how change is achieved by people organising, looking after one another and doing the hard work together to secure a fairer outcome. It also gave me opportunities that were not always readily available to women. Becoming the first woman to be elected to lead the Victorian vehicle division of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union was an enormous privilege. It taught me a great deal about leadership, resilience and bringing people together. It taught me to listen, know the detail, hold my ground when it mattered and never lose sight of the people affected by decisions. Those lessons followed me into Parliament and every ministerial portfolio I held. I also want to particularly acknowledge Paul Difelice for his support, friendship and contribution to that journey. I also thank the teams at the AMWU and the Victorian Trades Hall Council and the very many delegates, organisers and rank-and-file members whom I have worked with. The union movement helped shape me. Its belief that working people deserve dignity, security, opportunity and a genuine voice will always be part of me.

Being a parliamentarian and serving as a minister is a unique opportunity to make a difference. It is an opportunity that I have absolutely relished, but no-one does it alone. There is so much work, you have to work together. It is everything about a team effort. For young women in particular, who are still too often not shown a clear pathway into public life, a career in politics cannot simply be an idea that seems good at the time. You need to be clear about your values framework and have a strong sense of purpose before you are elected. You need to understand why you are here, who you represent and what you are prepared to work for, and those foundations must be strong enough to withstand change.

A strong sense of purpose is also important. As is knowing how to manage and drive the work but also knowing when to stop, listen to the people around you, take a break, make sure that you have the necessary health checks and above all stay connected, stay grounded and never forget why you are here or who you are representing. Ultimately public service is not measured by the title you hold or the announcement you make, it is measured by whether the work makes a genuine difference to people's lives.

Being a minister for nearly a decade across skills and TAFE, higher education, agriculture, regional development, water and corrections has been both humbling and incredibly fulfilling. I never saw these portfolios as separate from the people and places I represent. Whether the issue was training, water security or a stronger regional economy, the question was always: will this make a real difference in people's lives, including across western Victoria?

One of the greatest privileges of my career has been leading the skills and TAFE portfolio over that entire period and having the time needed to deliver deep and lasting reform. When we came to government, the public TAFE system had been brought to its knees. Confidence had been shattered, campuses closed, and too many students and communities had been left behind. We rebuilt that system from the ground up, restoring public provision and confidence, putting students, apprentices, industry

and communities back at the centre and delivering 45 new and upgraded TAFE campuses across Victoria.

Through free TAFE being introduced in 2019, we did not simply open more doors, we changed the system. This year we embedded free TAFE into law in this place, ensuring in law in this place that TAFEs are guaranteed a minimum level of funding to protect training for generations to come. It cannot be undone with the flick of a pen. Free TAFE has helped people retrain, upskill and move into secure, well-paid work without the burden of up-front fees – a practical difference when families face real cost-of-living pressures. We place TAFE at the centre of Victoria's future, delivering the housing and construction and renewable energy, health care and digital skills that our state needs.

I am especially proud of the stronger supports that we have put in place for apprentices and trainees. The Apprenticeships Taskforce, chaired by Sharan Burrow, brought apprentices, employers, unions, industry and training providers together to improve the training and workplace experience while better supporting employers. At its centre was a simple understanding: an apprenticeship is not merely a contract or qualification, it is about someone building a skill, a career, a more secure future, which is so important for the labour market and our economy.

Adult and community further education and our Learn Locals have also been central to our work, as is our support for the acuity information management system. Learn Locals meet people where they are. For many who have not had a positive experience of education, they provide a trusted first step back into learning and further training and work. I want to give a special shout-out to the trainers and teachers in that sector. Your ongoing commitment in the community is not just inspiring, it is absolutely commendable. I am proud that we have brought adult and community education out from behind the kitchen door, given it the recognition it deserves, and strengthened its place in our broader education and training system. We work to join the post-school system together from grassroots Learn Locals through to TAFE and universities, providing accessible pathways at every stage of life.

I have always believed that vocational education must stand up as an equal first choice alongside university. This shift in thinking must absolutely happen and happen at a pace. Otherwise, opportunities will be lost and economic growth will be undermined. I am proud that the reforms led here in Victoria have now largely been adopted by the Commonwealth and are helping to shape the national skills agenda. The study tours we undertook in the early days here and overseas reinforced that good policy is never developed in isolation. You must look outward, test ideas, learn from others and build strong relationships with people who absolutely understand the system firsthand. I thank everyone in the sector who shared their expertise. Those relationships made the policy better and turned that reform from paper into a reality.

Across my other portfolios I was equally driven by the same commitment to fairness, opportunity and long-term reform. In higher education we strengthened collaboration with universities and worked to widen participation and opportunity. During the pandemic we supported the sector through an extraordinarily difficult period. Through the higher education investment fund we helped protect the research jobs and capability so important to Victoria's future. Today the higher education sector is at a crossroads. Governance, accountability, appropriate behaviour, student visas, funding and social licence are some of the fraught issues on the table. They all need to be resolved as soon as possible if our universities are to serve our communities, the national interest, innovation and the economy.

In agriculture we strengthened biosecurity preparedness and ensured Victoria was well positioned to respond to major threats such as foot-and-mouth disease. In water we continued to support communities through drought, progressed long-term water security planning, advanced feasibility studies and continued to oppose water buybacks. Water is far too important to play politics with. It demands bipartisanship and a long-term approach. That is why we established the water security taskforce to propose ways to strengthen Victoria's water security into the future.

In regional development practical support, from the Geelong City Deal to regional worker accommodation and the Tiny Towns Fund, helped local economies and communities grow and adapt. In corrections we implemented significant reforms, including the establishment of the Post Sentence Authority and the introduction of more respectful body scanning practices. The portfolios were different, but the approach was the same: understand the problem, listen to those affected, do the work and focus on the practical difference it will make.

Turning to ministerial offices, I had the great fortune to work with extraordinarily fantastic ministerial staff. They worked all hours, united by purpose and able to test complicated problems from every angle at a remarkable speed. Their rigour, creativity and genuine joy in finding practical solutions were very difficult to beat in any workplace. To this day this has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my working life, and it is wonderful to see so many here today.

There well may be people in the chamber who might recall that the facilities here at Parliament some time ago were not exactly what they are today. In fact they were a far cry from it. Ministerial offices were small and cramped, with barely enough room to move, let alone to find somewhere comfortable during those very long overnight sittings. President, I hope that you will forgive me, but today I have brought in not a prop but evidence. Only eight years ago this tissue box became a firm favourite amongst my staff during those very long nights. It might not look much, but when the hours stretched on and the only place to stretch out was on the floor, sometimes under a meeting table, this humble tissue box was a highly prized pillow. In fact someone has put their name on it. It carries memories for me of late-night drafting, hurried briefings, cups of tea, tired laughter and a team that just kept going no matter what the hour was or what the circumstances were. To members of every ministerial team I worked with: thank you. I am immensely proud of what we achieved together, but I am just as grateful for the friendship, deep care and laughter that carried us through. I also thank my ministerial colleagues and the public servants who turned decisions into real outcomes for Victorians.

Turning to my electorate, throughout all of this Western Victoria was never simply the electorate name beneath my title. It was the place that grounded my work, tested our policies and reminded me every day who public service is for. I am enormously proud of what we have delivered across the region. Having completed my primary and secondary education in regional and rural schools, that lived experience shaped my approach and reinforced the importance of strong regional and education voices in everything I do. I take this opportunity now to give a huge shout-out to public education. I also take this opportunity to thank the remarkable teachers at Cummins Area School and Nuriootpa High. You were amazing, and I believe that there are many who still are in shock that I did not become that physical education teacher that they seemed to all think was inevitable. I also want to thank the dedicated academic staff in the politics department at Flinders University. They, together with Gough Whitlam's Labor government and the introduction of free university education, opened doors for me, that young woman from a regional background, which I could never ever have imagined were possible to exist.

Western Victoria stretches across cities, coastal communities, farming districts and small rural towns, each with its own identity, strengths and challenges. Representing it has meant a great many kilometres and more community halls, football clubs, schools, farms, hospitals, TAFE campuses and council offices than I could count. Over the years I have seen major projects deliver what will change communities for generations. I have also seen the enormous differences made by much smaller projects. A new facility at a local sporting club may not attract the biggest headline, but it might mean older members can finally enter safely and that a women's team has a proper place to change instead of the back of their car. The big projects matter enormously, but so do practical improvements that make a town stronger and more inclusive. Across the region, I am proud of new and upgraded specialist schools, from Portland to Colac; the renewal of South West TAFE and the Gordon, including the Centre of Excellence in Disability Inclusion, the new culinary school and the expanded trade facilities; as well as our partnership with Deakin University.

I am proud of the better rail services, improved regional hospitals and health services, upgraded sporting facilities and places such as the Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre that bring education, community and opportunity together under one roof. I am also proud of the work we did with the Portland community to support economic diversification and create new opportunities for the region through the Portland Diversification Fund. The Avalon Airport has become one of western Victoria's greatest strategic assets – an important gateway for passengers, freight, industry and tourism. Its continued growth is creating jobs and opening new economic opportunities for Geelong and the wider region. The \$676 million Geelong City Deal is delivering game-changing projects. From Nyaal Banyul, the Geelong convention centre, to the Apollo Bay harbour, the Twelve Apostles visitor precinct and the improvements right along the Great Ocean Road, these will support local jobs and businesses while creating a visitor experience worthy of the natural and cultural assets that we are so proud to share with the rest of the world.

I am proud to have been part of a Labor government that understands the strength and potential of regional Victoria, and I am very optimistic about the future of our region. Another great privilege has been seeing the growing recognition of the world's oldest living cultures and the traditional owners' leadership in caring for country and shaping the future. Budj Bim Cultural Landscape's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List was a moment of enormous pride. It recognised the Gunditjmara peoples' extraordinary cultural engineering and aquaculture practices and told the world what Aboriginal people have always known: this is a living cultural landscape of profound importance. I particularly thank traditional owners across the region for the knowledge, partnership, patience and leadership they shared with me as a local member and minister. There is much more work to be done, but I am grateful to have shared part of that journey and to have worked to ensure First Nations voices were recognised and included across every portfolio I led. Most importantly, I thank all of the people of Western Victoria for their generous support over the years. Five times you have placed trust in me. You have been kind, you have been respectful and you have been generous, but you have also been very forthright. I will be forever grateful for the privilege of representing you.

Now, turning to my electorate office, none of the work that I have outlined would have been possible without the extraordinary electorate team that I have had in Geelong. Electorate officers are often the first people that those in need speak to. They listen, explain, advocate and keep going until every avenue has been explored. For the entire time I have been in Parliament Kym Pearl has been my office manager. For close to 20 years her commitment has been outstanding, as has her ability to communicate with all sorts of people in all sorts of circumstances. We have often joked that the job requires a thick skin and a big smile – Kym has brought both in equal measure. Her judgement, loyalty, good humour and genuine care for the people of Western Victoria have been invaluable not only to me but to the many people who have turned to our office for help over the years. Kym, you have been beside me for this entire parliamentary journey. I could not have asked for a better person to share it with, and I am certain the next phase in your life will be incredibly successful and enjoyable.

I have also been blessed with many other wonderful electorate staff, some of whom have been with us for a substantial period of time. There was Luke Humphries, the supremely capable, highly skilled all-round good guy whom I consider to be my second son, and Chris Kelly, forever the teacher, organiser and wise counsel. To Sandy, Rose, Simon, Rosemary, Bella, Caroline, Darcy, Jenny, Janice, Andy, Judy, Sonia, Melissa, Eadie, Stef, Marcus, Heidi and Lizzie: thank you for your commitment, for the kilometres that you travel, for the deep care you have shown and for working so hard to get outcomes for the people of Western Victoria. I am immensely proud of all of you.

Now to family. It is hard to put in words what your love and your support has meant to me. Without complaint you have enabled me to do so many things that I love. You have lived with the long hours, the changed plans and the many times work came through that front door with me. My son was just 14 years old when I was elected in 2006; now he is a husband with his own little family. So much has happened during those 20 years. My many absences did not deter him from becoming a genuinely decent human being, and I could not be prouder of the person he has become. And now, with my

retirement, I hope that he, Lara and our beautiful granddaughter can cope with me being more firmly in their space and in their face as mother and nanna.

And to my husband Ian: I simply could not have done it without you. We first started working together in the late 1980s, long before we were married 26 years ago. We worked shoulder to shoulder through major negotiations in the car industry, industry policy debates and more than a few very, very difficult industrial disputes. I saw firsthand Ian's sharp mind, his judgement, and his instinctive understanding of working people and the industries that they rely on. A close friend recently at his retirement, in his speech, described Ian as the smartest and most strategic trade unionist he had ever met, and I think that sums him up pretty well. Ian, you are an exceptional partner. Not only have you kept things moving on the home front, but you have also been a guardian and carer to a special friend of ours who had early onset dementia, as well as helping out so many others along the way. Your support has never been loud or demanding; it has simply been there – steady, generous and unwavering. I could not have done any of this without you, and I simply cannot wait for us to have more family time together, to share new experiences with the people that we deeply love and to help write that book on the car industry from the inside.

It would be remiss of me also not to mention seven incredible women that simply could not be here today: Aunty Dr Geraldine Atkinson AO, president of Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, who was unwell and could not make the trip; Cath Whelan and Elaine Gillespie, who are overseas; Jenny Macklin; my sister-in-law Maria and my friend Leone Nolan, who are undergoing treatment; and of course my mum, who is interstate and incapacitated. I thank each and every one of you for everything and sincerely wish you the very best. Of course it is on days like this that you think about those that have passed and those that you would have liked to have spent more time with in their later years, and that is particularly the case for me this term. My father passed away. We do miss Ken, and we continue to grieve for him.

For more than 45 years I have had the honour of serving working people, including 36 in elected office. Throughout that time I have been guided by a commitment to inclusion and equity and to ensuring opportunity is open to all and that people who are too often left out have a genuine voice in the decisions that affect them.

I was not here for a short time, and I was not here simply to have a good time. I was here to use the time well and to get things done. As I look ahead, I do so with confidence in the depth of talent and energy within our own Labor team and the next generation of leaders who will continue the work of building a fairer and stronger Victoria. I take this opportunity to also thank local Labor MPs for their commitment, unity and support and particularly want to shout out to Chris Couzens, who does an amazing job, and Alison Marchant. With so many years in Parliament, it is simply time for me to pass the baton with a smile on my face and a head full of gratitude. Thank you.

*Members applauded.*

### ***Business of the house***

#### **Orders of the day**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:37): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 and 3, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### ***Motions***

#### **Budget papers 2026–27**

**Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the budget papers 2026–27 be taken into consideration.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:39): I rise to speak on the budget 2026–27, and this is another typical Labor government budget – another high-taxing, high-spending budget full of dodgy projects that are over time and over budget and secret taxes. Let us talk about this budget. This budget confirms Labor’s legacy as the most fiscally reckless government in Victoria’s history. It has once again ignored the needs of Victorian communities. Labor will charge Victorians higher taxes – secret taxes – while all the time increasing borrowing that will lead to record debt and higher interest payments. The tax revenue in this budget is forecast to grow to \$50.2 billion by 2029–30, an increase of 16.2 per cent in the amount of tax that Labor annually takes from Victorians, yet Victorians will see very little in return for that money. At the same time, net debt will increase to \$199.3 billion in 2029–30, and the interest payment on that debt will be \$32 million every single day. That is more than a million dollars an hour.

Despite the bushfires that ravaged Victoria throughout the summer of 2026, our bushfire-affected communities will see little money from this budget, and the promised money that they did have in the budget for new CFA tankers and pumpers is spread out over a decade, meaning only \$10 million is available per year for new firefighting vehicles, while the government will take \$6.87 billion from Victorians through the emergency services tax over the next four years alone.

While we are talking about taxes, let us talk about the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office’s (VAGO) bombshell report that revealed Labor’s secret, mean and deceptive tax. This is the elephant in the room for this budget. I am the first person to get to speak on this, because when most other people gave their budget speeches they did not know about this tax, it was so secretive. Labor’s secret, mean, deceptive tax will be imposed on all public transport fares until 2062. That is almost 40 years of taxing. Although we will not find any mention of it in the budget; it is hidden in the value capture revenue of the Suburban Rail Loop – a tax that has been put on, as I said, every public transport fare, metro and regional.

Regional people were expected to pay this tax – until Ben Carroll suddenly had an epiphany and backflipped on it yesterday – on every train and bus that they caught to pay for a rail tunnel that they would never even use. It was revealed by VAGO that the government actually decided to do this in 2021, when Ben Carroll was the public transport minister, but they kept it secret. The fact that the tax was kept secret shows that integrity will always be optional under Labor governments. There is no integrity when it comes to Labor. This tax was expected to raise \$8 billion by 2062. Sixty per cent of that tax, or \$4.8 billion, was to go into the Suburban Rail Loop as part of the value capture contributions. This indicates that way back in 2021 Labor knew that their much-lauded value capture scheme was not going to cover the cost of that project. In fact, out of all of the value capture components of the project, this tax was the single largest contributor. Labor actually commenced charging this tax two years ago. Two years ago they began charging Victorians this tax in secret with no intention of ever telling them about the tax, and the tax was to be charged for nine full years before the project was even scheduled to begin.

VAGO identified that in January this year the government were aware that the Suburban Rail Loop was likely to go over budget and over time. But the then Premier Jacinta Allan, the then Treasurer Jaclyn Symes and the then Suburban Rail Loop minister Harriet Shing continued to mislead Victorians and the Parliament by claiming this project was on time and on budget. The current Premier Ben Carroll also knew about this. He was the Minister for Public Transport when the tax was approved in 2021. The tax was projected to cost frequent public transport users up to \$60 per week, or more than \$3000 a year, but Labor did not even tell them they were taxing it. It was expected to raise \$8 billion by 2062, of which 60 per cent, or \$4.8 billion, would go to the Suburban Rail Loop.

Even worse than misleading Victorians on whether the project was on time and on budget is the fact that the Labor government lied in March this year when they moved to slow the project down and said it would save \$800 million by slowing it down. VAGO has exposed that the Labor government were advised that it would actually be more expensive if they slowed it down. They revealed that it actually added an extra \$1.4 billion to the project, but Labor said, ‘No, we’re saving \$800 million’ – rubbish. The report also revealed that this government did not have enough money to sign the contracts for the

stations, so it delayed entering into those contracts, which will also increase the cost of the project even further. This is one of the biggest financial scandals ever in Victoria and confirms what Labor elder Stephen Conroy told the media this week: the Suburban Rail Loop is a dog of a project. The real scandal, however, is that every senior Labor member of cabinet over the past four years – Ben Carroll, Gabrielle Williams, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Jaclyn Symes, Tim Pallas, Colin Brooks and Harriet Shing – knew about this secret tax, knew the Suburban Rail Loop was a dog of a project that was over budget and over time and were all prepared to lie to the Victorian public about all of this. What other secret taxes are Labor levying on Victorians without telling them? Labor should come clean and cough up about all their secret taxes.

Announcing that the tax would be scrapped yesterday is too little, too late. It does not erase the fact that the government has kept it secret from the Victorian people. It does not refund the tax already collected for the past two years. It does not erase any of the misleading comments made by Jacinta Allan, Jaclyn Symes and Harriet Shing. But the biggest impact for Labor is the enormous budget black hole that they now have in this year's budget and in the Suburban Rail Loop project. Ben Carroll needs to come clean and tell Victorians how he plans to fill that hole and whether he plans to introduce yet another new tax to prop up Labor's ailing budget bottom line.

I would now like to talk about a few of the things in my electorate that did not get funded. When we look to the Yan Yean electorate, there is no funding in this year's budget for a new Beveridge train station or for the Wollert rail despite the Labor government announcing its intention to facilitate thousands of new homes in Beveridge and despite it promising to release its feasibility study for Wollert rail by the end of last year. There is also no funding for extra car parking space at Donnybrook train station to help commuters access train services to the city. The lucky ones who do find a park might not even find a seat on a train, as the chronic under-investment in trains means regular overcrowding.

The budget contains no funding to duplicate Donnybrook Road all the way through from the Hume Highway to Epping Road, which is the single most important upgrade for alleviating chronic traffic congestion in the area. There is also no funding to extend Cameron Street to Merriang Road to provide alternate entry and exit points to housing estates along Donnybrook Road. There is no funding for new bus services to new estates in the Whittlesea or Donnybrook areas. This is an area where residents are being forced to travel by car in congested traffic on Donnybrook Road. They were sold the Australian dream by this government of new houses in new estates, and they are living the Australian nightmare out there. There is no money for additional police to reopen their police stations, and the residents are seeing increased crime and not able to access a police officer when they want to. The residents want to be connected to retail and business centres in Mernda and Doreen, and they need additional public transport in order to do that, but of course, as I said, there is no money for additional buses.

In the seat of Macedon there was no money to upgrade the intersection at Urquhart Street and High Street in Woodend – a really dangerous intersection. There is no money for planning work for the Hanging Rock to Daylesford rail trail and no money for any redevelopment of the Daylesford hospital, and that is a hospital that desperately needs investment. In fact that hospital had to fund its own master plan because Labor would not even look at a master plan for it. The health minister was their local member, and she has absolutely ignored this hospital. The urgent care at that hospital desperately needs an upgrade, but there is no money for that.

There was no money for the Woodend Racecourse Reserve to upgrade the facilities there for young children playing soccer and for females playing sport. There was no money for the Macedon Cats to see their home ground have improved facilities, and no money for Lancefield Park for the recreation reserve redevelopment there or to expand the hours at the Kyneton police station.

But in Macedon the real story is around their schools. Of the 28 schools in the Macedon area, 50 per cent are deemed to be in poor condition, desperately needing maintenance but there is no money for maintenance of those schools. A further 36 per cent of the schools are in worn condition. That is 86 per

cent of the schools in poor or worn condition. Only four schools have condition ratings of good, which is 14 per cent of the schools. In greater Shepparton we have 19 schools in worn condition and two in poor condition and no money for those schools. There are seven schools there that are considered to be good, and Greater Shepparton Secondary College is amongst those.

In Shepparton there was no money for the basketball stadium, the Shepparton sports and events centre; no money for stage 2 of the Goulburn Valley Health redevelopment, including the integrated cancer centre; no money for stage 2 of the Banmira Specialist School redevelopment, which has been left half-done and all boarded up and looks disgraceful; no money for the Shepparton bypass; no money for many other projects that are vitally important to that community.

The Labor government have ignored regional Victoria. We have seen a great deal of projects go unfunded because Labor is only concentrating on metropolitan seats and all of their money is going into the one project: the Suburban Rail Loop. This week the Auditor-General and Stephen Conroy have exposed this government on that project because it is an absolute dog of a project. There are many projects in regional Victoria that need to be funded. Regional Victorians are vitally important, and this government totally ignores them. Unlike Labor, the coalition government will guarantee a 25 per cent infrastructure share for regional Victoria to see money invested in infrastructure in regional Victoria that supports regional communities to live productive lives and for our children to have access to decent schools and decent sporting facilities.

Only the Liberal Party cares about regional Victoria. Only the Liberal Party will invest in regional Victoria, because only the Liberal Party will govern for all Victorians. Jess Wilson will be an amazing premier. She will govern for all Victorians, unlike Labor, who kind of govern for metropolitan regions but really govern for the vested interests of the Labor Party in this state and the benefits that they can pass on to their mates or they can get for themselves out of governing, and that is not good governance.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:54): I rise to make a contribution on the budget take-note motion on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This budget is a mixed bag for Victoria. While it did not include everything we had hoped for, I would like to begin by highlighting some of the positives. This year the government committed \$415.5 million for alcohol and other drug (AOD) services across Victoria. It is a modest increase on previous years, but more needs to be done for this sector if we want to take a health-led approach.

Funding in the budget extended the integrated care pilot for First Step to provide mental health and addiction support services. First Step's model of care is best practice. It helps to address the systemic barriers faced by people with complex mental health issues and addiction, and a whole-of-life approach helps Victorians to take control of their lives. Additional investments were made towards a low-dose methadone trial, Victorian pill-testing services and continued implementation of take-home naloxone. Access to these life-saving medications, including naloxone, will reduce overdose deaths in Victoria. Opioid overdoses remain the leading cause of drug-related death in Victoria. No family member should have to experience the tragedy of losing a loved one. The funding and commitment to implement a trial of 20 naloxone vending machines within emergency departments will save lives. However, further funding for drug-checking services that reduce the risks posed by the increasingly toxic drug supply, medication-assisted treatment for opioid dependence and community education efforts is falling short. Despite these investments, total funding for the AOD sector in Victoria only saw a small increase of 4.24 per cent from last year's budget.

This comes at a time when the need is increasing exponentially. The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, VAADA, 2025 sector demand survey found that there were 4550 Victorians on waitlists for various forms of funded alcohol and other drug treatments. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's 25th national wastewater drug-monitoring program report showed that consumption of heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine has reached unprecedented levels. The Victorian Coroners Court found that 584 Victorians overdosed in 2024. That is the highest number on record. We need to do more.

Behind every overdose is a story. I often reflect on the ribbons tied on church fences, those that reflect the untold horrors of child sexual abuse. Many of those same victim-survivors end up in alcohol and drug treatment services, needing our help, not our judgement. Anyone who works in AOD will tell you that when someone is in the throes of addiction the aim is to keep them alive until they can be helped to get better. This means increasing the availability of naloxone and investment in more supervised injecting rooms. Victorians battling alcohol and other drug addictions need help, and they are waiting for far too long to get that help. The AOD strategy recognises that stigma is a part of the problem and that we must approach addiction as a health issue. However, the lack of available services and extensive wait times have serious consequences, contributing to rising homelessness and leaving many suffering with addiction issues untreated. Median wait times from assessment to treatment within the alcohol and drug sector are still 40 days, doubling the government's own target. Sector data shows the alcohol and drug system is under serious pressure.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Excuse me, Ms Payne. Apologies for interrupting, but it has come to our attention that you may have already spoken on the budget take-note motion.

**Rachel PAYNE:** I will end it there, then.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** It was on 30 July, I have been informed by the table office. I am sorry: we will need to wrap that up.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:58): I rise to speak on the budget take-note motion. I am doing it a little later than I would have liked given the budget was in May and it was a budget of the Allan Labor government. We have since got a different Premier, one who supposedly cares about fiscal discipline. Can you believe that? We have seen under the nearly 12 years of this government no regard for fiscal discipline.

They inherited from then Treasurer Michael O'Brien quite a good set of books, and they have blown the budget to \$200 billion of debt, which means Victorians will be paying more each and every day. They are already paying over \$1 million an hour in interest – not to pay down that huge pile of debt but just to service the interest on the debt. This is the legacy of this Labor government. This is the legacy that will be bequeathed to our children and grandchildren by this Labor government – this Andrews–Allan–Carroll government; they are all one and the same. They can say they are different, but as Ms Crozier said, it is the same snake, different heads under this Andrews–Allan–Carroll government, because they are the same government. It is the same government Mr Carroll served in as Deputy Premier for three years. It is the same government that Premier Carroll sat in as a senior minister for the better part of a decade. This is the legacy of this same government, this tired government that has run out of puff, that is corrupt and that has been accused multiple times of corruption by our integrity agencies. This is a gangster government. They cannot pretend they are in a new direction when Victorians just want change.

Give it a few announcements, and how can we go past Minister Erdogan's today? I think if the government has learned one lesson out of today, it is never send Minister Erdogan out to the press, because he will always give away more than he should have. He talked about expenditure and stopping things like coffee machines and pot plants, and then he started talking about artworks. Who bought up artworks? No-one actually raised artworks. Naturally the press pack is quite interested in this. 'How much did you spend? Was it thousands?' 'No, I think it's more than that.' 'Was it tens of thousands?' 'Oh, no, it was more than that. They're actually quite expensive.' It sounds like the government has spent millions of dollars on artwork for public servants. What I want to know is how much they have actually spent. This is the extravagance of this government. I want to know if any of it was for ministerial offices, as I have heard.

When Labor came to office net debt was just \$21.8 billion, less than 6 per cent of GSP. They inherited a good set of books from Premier Napthine and Treasurer O'Brien. Labor is now driving Victoria towards a \$200 billion debt; net debt is growing by \$1.2 million an hour. Victoria will spend more this

year on interest repayments than on the operation of Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and all kindergarten services combined, with still a billion dollars left over in change. How can any member of the government, including those opposite, sit there in this chamber and take pride in the economic vandalism they have inflicted on this state? I read in particular Tuesday's editorial in the *Australian Financial Review*:

... the state's government is on track to spend one in every 10 dollars it raises in taxes paying down debt interest, according to credit ratings agency Moody's.

Victoria has the highest state debt in absolute terms at \$215 billion – or 30.7 per cent of gross state product – despite its economy being about 25 per cent smaller than NSW's.

This week we have seen absolutely shocking revelations from the Auditor-General's report *Delivering the Suburban Rail Loop* that when Ben Carroll was Minister for Public Transport a new tax was put on in 2021 – a new tax on each and every Victorian, who have already been slugged for about \$6 million since it has been operating. It is due to raise about \$8 billion. It is a new tax that Minister Symes, and supposedly Gab Williams as well, who brought it to the budget and finance committee – or so her colleagues say in the corridors – knew about. The now Premier Carroll knew about it and did not tell Victorians.

Last year, when the government announced its value capture mechanisms, which included state-initiated development, land tax, existing revenues that are not actually value capture because you have got to take them from consolidated revenue, the car parking levy and all this other stuff, they failed to mention that the public transport tax was a big part of this. If you have an \$8 billion black hole in the Suburban Rail Loop, it is clearly no longer funded, so what my colleagues and I want to know is: how are you going to fill that black hole in the Suburban Rail Loop? You cannot.

Premier Carroll said on Monday that he has made all these savings: he has made a billion dollars in savings, and he is going to make a billion dollars more. So the cost went from about \$34 billion to \$33 billion, even though people like former minister Shing have always said it is a range between \$30 billion and \$34 billion. Yet if we look at the close detail of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report – I am not sure if Mr Erdogan has read it either – all of the announced savings they have made in the budget were not actually funded in the business case. They were not actually in the business case and were not actually funded commitments. I am not sure if those opposite understand, but you cannot cut things that were not actually funded in the first place. How do you take a billion dollars off the top of a project range – they obviously went to the top of the range – and save a billion dollars from that project when they were not actually funded? They had no intention of delivering car parks to Glen Waverley. They had no intention of doing these interchanges. They are going to make people get off at one station and walk out, exposed to the elements, across the Nepean Highway, through Box Hill. It is going to be absolute chaos.

The government says, 'We've always had a positive cost-benefit ratio.' If you ask them about that, they say – we all remember Ms Shing doing it – 'You have to compare it with the northern section, because that's when you get the cost-benefit analysis.' These guys have said that value capture components are going to be extrapolated over 40 years – \$11.5 billion paid up-front and then a loan taken out over 40 years. On anything over a 10-year loan the Treasury Corporation of Victoria yield is about 6.25 per cent. If you extrapolate that over 40 years, before it even pays off the \$11.5 billion, the government is paying over \$28 billion in interest. That is why you will never build SRL North, and that is why SRL East does not stack up.

I say to Mr Erdogan and I say to Premier Carroll: release the contracts. Be honest with Victorians for once. Be honest with Victorians that you cannot fund this project. The amount of times we hear from Ms Symes or Ms Shing that it is on track and on budget, over and over again – well, if you read this, it is neither on budget nor on time. That is unlikely. The Auditor-General has said what we have been saying for years: how can the North East Link, the West Gate Tunnel, the Metro Tunnel and level crossings all have a consistent 20 per cent inflationary cost blowout over the last few years but the

SRL business case, which was done in 2020, be somehow immune since then to any cost blowouts? It does not make sense. Nothing about this government makes sense.

Now we find out they have been lying to Victorians over this secret tax. The Premier now says he apologises to Victorians. Well, he is not sorry for implementing this tax or for knowing about this tax; he is sorry he got caught. That is all he is sorry for. He says he is going to abolish the tax. Where is the \$8 billion hole going to be plugged from? Schools, hospitals, police – even further cuts to police? Where is it going to be funded from? This government cares more about concrete than Victorian people. It cares more about a rail tunnel in the eastern suburbs than the state of our roads. It cares more about a rail tunnel in the eastern suburbs than delivering infrastructure that is desperately needed in the growth suburbs.

This government is an absolute disgrace. It has pitted Victorian against Victorian by picking winners, thinking that it can build this rail tunnel from Cheltenham to Box Hill that no-one asked for. Minister Erdogan today said that we can achieve independent advice through our independent departments. Deborah Glass and other integrity agencies have already said the public service has been politicised. Minister Erdogan comes out and announces today that Infrastructure Victoria is going to be abolished, a body that it created to take the politics out of infrastructure. Then it goes off to PwC and has them dream up a rail line, a Suburban Rail Loop, that no-one asked for, which Infrastructure Victoria was not consulted on and no-one senior in the Department of Transport and Planning was consulted on. I mean, give us a spell – taking the politics out of infrastructure. This was all about a vanity project of Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan, and Ben Carroll, when he was in cabinet, did not have the ticker to stand up to Daniel Andrews or Jacinta Allan on this project. Cabinet ministers like Ros Spence, Enver Erdogan and others never had the ticker to stand up for growth areas and for regional communities on the Suburban Rail Loop. I know in their heart of hearts they know this is a dog of a project. They probably agree with Stephen Conroy that this is an absolute dog of a project.

It does not benefit your electorate, Mr Erdogan, and we know the Broadmeadows section will not be built until 2053. All Broadmeadows has been asking for is an upgraded train station. Frank McGuire promised one, and it never happened. Hume City Council asked the government about their plans for Broadmeadows; of course they do not have any because they completely stopped work on planning SRL North – completely stopped. They do not even know where the stations are going to go. When they are asked about interference with the Heidelberg hospital precinct and Austin and Mercy and MRI machines, they cannot tell you anything about it. They are never actually planning on doing SRL North, which means the SRL East will never have a positive cost-benefit ratio, which means we are pouring tens of billions of dollars into a rail line to nowhere.

Even their own business case, which former Minister Shing touted, has the workforce returning to pre-COVID levels of working in the office and travel, when we know that is not the case. The government is even introducing – we think – work from home legislation that completely alters the business case of the Suburban Rail Loop and alters how it stacks up. This government has chosen a concrete tunnel over Victorians. It has chosen a concrete tunnel over the healthcare needs of Victorians, over Victorian roads and over keeping the community safe and actually funding our police. It is an absolute disgrace. And then it has the gall to hide a tax. Ben Carroll, this new Premier, is no different to Jacinta Allan and Daniel Andrews, because he knew about this secret tax. He did nothing about it. He only says he is going to scrap it because he got caught. He is not sorry about the tax; he is only sorry he got caught.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:13): I move:

That debate be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

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

*Condolences*

**Neale Daniher AO**

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

That this house expresses its deep sorrow at the passing of Neale Daniher AO, footballer, coach, Victorian of the Year, Australian of the Year, and co-founder of FightMND, who faced motor neurone disease with extraordinary courage and grace, transforming personal hardship into hope for millions, and whose legacy will endure in Victoria and across the nation.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:14): I am really proud to have the opportunity to speak to this motion. Just after the time of Neale Daniher's state funeral I heard he had a couple of books, and I had a listen to the second one, *The Power of Choice*. It really resonated with me. I actually listened to it twice, it was that good. Neale Daniher was nicknamed the Reverend, I think. I do not think he wrote that in the book, but I picked that up. It is just fantastic. It did not deal with his sports career or other aspects of his earlier careers, but it picked up on his philosophies that he took from life and how to apply them in life, from him growing up on the farm and moving to Melbourne, to the challenges that he faced, the opportunities he faced at becoming captain at Essendon, but the injuries that set him back and ended his career, going out and retraining in IT, coming back as Melbourne coach and being in the coaches association at the Eagles, I believe it was.

He spoke in the book about the attitude that people bring, and when he was diagnosed with MND, Neale decided that his attitude would be one of: what are the possibilities? He talks about being courageous, and he speaks about how he did not want to go out in front of 60,000, 70,000, 80,000 or 90,000 people at the Queen's Birthday football games between Collingwood and Melbourne – and I went to many of those as a Collingwood supporter – but he chose to be courageous and lean into it. He talks a lot about accepting responsibility. If you make mistakes, stand up and own them, and if things happen to you that are not your fault – and he talks about MND. MND was not his fault. He went to a specialist and found out one day that is what he had. For him, the philosophies he spoke to were about accepting your lot, working within it and practising gratitude.

I think a beautiful part of the book is when he talked about the fact that when he was no longer able to walk, what was the opportunity? The opportunity for him was to play with his grandkids on the couch. When he lost the ability to talk, he had more opportunity to listen to people. There are just so many little anecdotes like that throughout the book. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to read it. It is maybe 5 hours of listening but a very, very good book.

He talked about action over words, and we saw that with FightMND. He led from the front. He brought a couple of very capable people with him on that journey and raised awareness of MND. We have seen at the top about the awards he won. He did incredible things to raise awareness and a whole lot of money for research. He talked about making the world a better place and leaving a legacy. I think everyone in this chamber, and indeed people right across Victoria and Australia, will acknowledge what a legacy Neale Daniher has left. He was an incredible person, and again, I just recommend reading his book *The Power of Choice* because it has got so many fantastic takeaways.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:18): I rise to speak to the motion that the government has brought on today. The motion was first brought into the house soon after the death of Neale Daniher in May of this year, and in early June, the house moved:

That this house expresses its deep sorrow at the passing of Neale Daniher AO, footballer, coach, Victorian of the Year, Australian of the Year, and co-founder of FightMND, who faced motor neurone disease with extraordinary courage and grace, transforming personal hardship into hope for millions, and whose legacy will endure in Victoria and across the nation.

I would like to lend my support to this motion, even though it is some three months afterwards. I feel a little awkward in speaking to it so long after the extraordinary outpouring of grief after Neale Daniher had died and his state funeral, which I attended, which was so beautifully done. Those who spoke at

that really highlighted so many different elements of this truly remarkable Australian and wonderful Victorian.

I first met Neale not long after he was diagnosed, I suppose, because he was diagnosed in 2013. It was through a friend of mine Don McLardy, who was a great, longstanding friend of Neale's. They had a great, long friendship and worked very closely on the charitable cause and the MND foundation that endured after Neale's shocking diagnosis. When I met Neale we were sitting in Don's backyard in the garden, and he was so easy to speak with. He was just a wonderful human being, and that shone through. He was a very warm person. It was just a lovely meeting, and I felt really grateful to have had that time with him at that point.

A lot has been said about Neale Daniher and the extraordinary legacy that he has left, and I will just touch on a few things. He was born in West Wyalong in 1961, so he grew up on a farm with his brothers, who all played AFL–VFL football. Neale, as I said earlier, died on 25 May, aged 65, and had been diagnosed with MND for 13 years. That was an extraordinary length of time to be living with MND because the life expectancy is much, much shorter. But he was incredibly determined. I mean, he showed that resilience and courage right through his football career.

He had many football career highlights. He played 82 games for Essendon, was named the league's recruit of the year in his debut season, won Essendon's best and fairest in 1981 and was made club captain in 1982 – the youngest ever to be appointed to that role. He coached Melbourne for 223 games, from 1998 to 2007, and I know that is where Don McLardy, a great Melbourne supporter, would have started that longstanding friendship with Neale. During that time there were 12 finals in the decade, and I am sure those Melbourne supporters in the house would understand that. And as many Melbourne Demons fans would attest, he took the Demons from last place on the ladder in 1997 to a preliminary final in the first season in 1998 and that grand final appearance in 2000.

As Mr McIntosh has said, he earned the nickname the Reverend for his passion and inspirational speaking style and for his tireless promotion of the club. Those former players, who all had such a great connection with him, described him as a great philosopher and father figure. I wanted to speak to that because I did see some words he spoke in 2019, and again, the books he has written have been alluded to, and that is after his fight with MND. But it really was the tenacity and courage of Neale Daniher that was truly the hallmark of his achievements, not only in football but also in all of those other inspirational speeches that he provided to young men and young footballers coming through.

I just want to make a few comments around this speech that he delivered in 2019 for FightMND on having the courage to accept responsibility. He made this speech in Melbourne, and there is just so much in it that is wonderful. He was telling the story as a new grandfather to grandson Cooper. He was relaying the story about how he could not protect Cooper forever, and he made some very profound comments:

Life's good – but life doesn't promise to be fair.

I'd like to tell Cooper, 'Look mate, there'll be good times, but there will be hard times.

That is exactly his point: life is hard, it is tough – and it is. It can have ups and downs and bumps all along the roads, and it can be terribly unfair for many. He goes on to say:

No matter what happens, it's up to you to do something about it. Have the courage to accept responsibility. Don't shy away from it, don't baulk, don't procrastinate, don't handball it to someone else. And by doing that, what will emerge inside you is the better side of your character.

These are the extraordinary, profound words that he was relaying to this group of people to explain what he was saying to his grandson and why it is important to have that courage and to understand that life is a rough road. It can be terribly unfair. It can be terribly tough. He goes on to say:

That will allow you to move through it. And it might even allow you to transcend ...

And finally, taking responsibility means looking for the opportunity. When life gets difficult, you think it's a train wreck, there's no opportunity – there's always opportunity.

He said:

I was diagnosed with a disease that will kill me. No treatment, no cure, no hope, some say. Where's the opportunity?

He went on to say:

There's always opportunity, and my opportunity was to fight MND, and that's allowed me to prevail. It's allowed me to find my purpose, to transcend what's happening to me.

He wanted to show Cooper what the right way was. I just think that was a very significant address that he made. It was one of many. There are lots of videos of him speaking to people and his incredible inspirational words that he had. I think that tenacity and extraordinary determination was there for all to see, and we saw that over many, many years – the Big Freeze that was started, the extraordinary fundraising efforts that were done. I understand over \$150 million has been raised through FightMND. This is just an extraordinary amount, and that just shows the generosity from the public who were donating to that cause, because they could see the human side of Neale and just what a tremendous, extraordinary individual he was. They wanted to contribute to the cause, and they have. I think it just shows a lot about people like that who have great inspiration that can bring others along with them, and Neale Daniher certainly did that through his football career as a player and coach and as somebody who was giving inspiration to all those that were coming after him, but no more so than in looking for a cure to fight MND.

There is one last thing I want to say. The McLardy McShane charitable golf days that happen every year that my friend Don McLardy organises are great fun. They are golf days, and so many people come out and play in that game. It is really good fun. I have enjoyed the time I have had and the pleasure to be able to do that and to see the money that is raised. I have seen Jan and other members of the family there, and they have just been right by Neale's side throughout all those 13 years. They were all quite extraordinary speaking at his funeral. I just would like to extend again my condolences to the family, friends and all that knew Neale very, very well and so many around this country and further afield that admired him for all he has done under very, very difficult circumstances.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (15:28): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Toy libraries**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (15:28): (2758) My adjournment matter this afternoon is for the Minister for Children Lizzie Blandthorn. More than 40 toy libraries are sharing over \$350,000 in state grants. The action I seek is an update on how this funding will help ease the cost-of-living pressures for families by providing access to quality toys and resources and on approximately how many families regularly use toy libraries across Victoria.

### **Fire services**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (15:28): (2759) My matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services regarding the growing lack of fire and emergency response capacity across Melbourne's western suburbs. The action I seek is for the minister to urgently review Fire Rescue Victoria's resources in the western growth corridor and commit to additional stations, appliances and firefighters to ensure that my communities receive emergency response times they can rely on. Earlier this year the Werribee community was devastated by the tragic loss of a three-year-old child in a house fire. It

was a heartbreaking incident that has shaken the community, and it serves as a reminder that when emergencies occur every minute counts. While firefighters work tirelessly to protect lives, local crews are warning that Melbourne's west is becoming increasingly under-resourced and unable to keep pace with the rapid growth occurring across our region. The evidence is clear from Fire Rescue Victoria's own response time data that between July and November 2025 Caroline Springs was recorded as the worst performing district in Victoria for code 1 structure fire response and the second worst for emergency medical response. Tarneit and Point Cook ranked among the poorest performing districts in the state for structure fire response times.

Tarneit, Derrimut and Sunbury were also among the lowest performing for emergency incident response. It is important to make clear that these figures are not a reflection on the dedication or capacity of the crews, rather they are the result of stations being expected to cover enormous response areas across some of Victoria's fastest growing communities. In many cases firefighters are responding not only within their primary district but also into neighbouring growth areas because there are simply not enough resources available. In 2001 the combined population of Melton and Wyndham was around 130,000 people. Today the figure exceeds 560,000 and continues to grow, with the Melton and Wyndham LGAs being two of the fastest growing areas in Victoria. Yet despite a profound – more than fourfold – increase in population, there has been little corresponding growth in the professional firefighting structure since 2008. We are approaching summer. I ask the minister: what immediate action will the government take to improve Fire Rescue Victoria response times in Melbourne's west and ensure growing communities like Wyndham and Melton in my electorate receive the emergency response investment they urgently need before another tragedy occurs?

#### **Veterans support**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:31): (2760) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Veterans. Former members of the ADF, through the training they have received, often have highly specialised skills that can be invaluable to the broader workforce. Despite this, veterans can sometimes face barriers to getting into the civilian workforce when they finish their service. This can not only cause great stress for the individuals struggling to find work but also deprive the economy of the skills that these impressive individuals have attained through their time in the Australian Defence Force. Given that, I think that it is of incredible benefit to make sure that these veterans are easily able to reintegrate themselves back into the civilian workforce. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how the Victorian government is helping veterans make the transition into the civilian workforce.

#### **Child protection**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:32): (2761) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children. For more than two decades Djirra has worked on the front line of Aboriginal women's and children's safety, demonstrating that deep and relational experience has built specialist expertise and an evidence base about what keeps Aboriginal women and their children safe, what systemic change is needed and what must be built for the future for Aboriginal women and children to really thrive. Throughout the Yoorrook Justice Commission, Aboriginal women came forward with immense courage to speak their truths. They laid bare the devastating and ongoing realities of systemic racism, family violence, criminalisation, incarceration and, heartbreakingly, child removal, which continues to this day. They also spoke about what makes a difference: access to specialist Aboriginal services, including access to specialist legal advice and representation, and places where women and their children are safe, heard and supported. Djirra has been doing this hard work since its inception 22 years ago. Day in, day out they see firsthand how the child protection system blames and punishes Aboriginal mums for the violence perpetrated against them and removes their children. Djirra has advocated for a child protection notification and referral system that would ensure Aboriginal mums are referred to Djirra at the earliest point of child protection involvement. This is reflected in the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recommendation 12. Minister, given this recommendation from the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the action I seek is: will you commit to

implementing a child protection notification and referral system to protect Aboriginal women and their children?

### Fire services

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:34): (2762) It has been a month now since those opposite toppled their party's second-ever female Premier. That is right; it has been a month. Doesn't a month go very quickly for those opposite? A month ago I wrote to the new minister under the new – male – Premier Ben Carroll, and I wrote to that minister because I was most concerned about the state of affairs under Fire Rescue Victoria. Those in this place might recall that the previous minister, Minister Ward, was renowned in this place because, throughout her entire tenure as minister, not once did she manage to attend a graduation ceremony for a single firefighter – a disgraceful effort. That will be an effort that will go down in the history books and the annals of this place, including of course *Hansard* in which it is now recorded, very sadly. Not one graduation ceremony did the last minister ever attend, much to her shame. Nonetheless, in addition to that, to the best of my recollection and knowledge not once did she ever visit a dedicated FRV fire station. From time to time she might have brought it upon herself to go to a CFA station, and it was all good and well, but nonetheless, unfortunately not once were our dedicated professional firefighters visited by the previous minister in their workplace to hear for herself their concerns, including the fact that for five years now they have not received a single cent of pay rise. It is a shameful situation for those opposite.

To think that they are called a labour – with an 'our' – party. Of course they took the 'u' out of that, and that is very wise of those opposite, because it has been a long time since they have represented workers in this state. Very sadly, they certainly do not represent professional firefighters, having not paid them a cent of pay rise for the better part of five years in terms of the firefighters and six years in terms of corporate staff. They have let them languish. They have done so knowingly. In addition to that, they have deprived the entire service of the equipment they need to fight fires, including their fleet. We know that 65 per cent of the firefighting fleet of Fire Rescue Victoria is past its service date. That means firefighters can have no assurance that they will actually get to a fire in a timely manner – or that they will get there at all, frankly – because that fleet is so unreliable.

I wrote to the new minister. I thought we might be off to a better start. Well, unfortunately and sadly, I wrote on 4 August and on 25 August I had a response. It took the new minister just 21 days. In other words, 21 days is probably an eighth of his entire tenure, because we will soon go into caretaker mode. It took him the better part of 21 days to respond and simply say 'No' – convention out the window; parliamentary courtesy out the window – 'we're refusing to give the shadow minister a meeting with the minister to discuss these urgent matters about the firefighting service in Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria.' Therefore, I ask the minister not to be as delinquent as the last minister and to at least front a meeting with me to discuss the urgent need to pay our firefighters the five years back pay they are owed, including the corporate staff, and to address urgently the fire truck crisis in this state.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** That was to the Minister for Emergency Services?

**Nick McGOWAN:** That is correct.

### Avian influenza

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (15:37): (2763) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the government to adopt a bird flu response that is consistent with other states. Just yesterday it was reported that hundreds of dead birds have accumulated around the Glenelg River estuary at Nelson in Victoria, just 3 kilometres from the South Australian border. Local ecologists have estimated that at least 400 bird carcasses have been left discarded in that area. There are concerns that more migratory birds will arrive in the coming weeks and make this situation significantly worse.

Bird flu is a national emergency, and we desperately need a consistent approach across the country. As authorities have repeatedly pointed out, migratory birds do not adhere to state boundaries, and neither does this virus. Right now we are seeing anything but that national approach, as is evidenced by the situation at Nelson near the Victoria–South Australia border. In South Australia, on their side, crews are taking an active approach by collecting dead birds and responding to sick wildlife. In fact the South Australian government has deployed dedicated teams working along the Limestone Coast who are collecting and disposing of dead birds and euthanising the sick ones. They have also established a dedicated bird carcass bin in Robe. We are even seeing the South Australian government paying birdwatchers to monitor for symptoms.

Meanwhile, in stark contrast, the Victorian government has been behind on this issue. In Nelson residents are being left to watch dead birds, including pelicans, magpies and ravens, accumulate along our waterways without a comparable government response. Like locals have been warning, I also hold serious concerns that leaving carcasses built up in one area will only lead to a higher risk of transmission to other species. Government officers have publicly said they are working with local councils and landholders, but it is clear that that is not enough. Residents are urging the Victorian government to deploy crews to collect these carcasses, as is being done elsewhere.

What is most frustrating is that we have rescue groups such as Vets for Compassion, who stand ready and able to head out into the field and do this work immediately. They just need to be given the green light. These people hold the required skill sets, and the ongoing decision to not let them into the field highlights the persistent disrespect that is shown to our hardworking wildlife rescue volunteers. The Victorian government have not been prepared for the consequences of this virus reaching our wildlife because they have not heeded the warning calls so far, so now that this virus is here and is wreaking havoc, I call on the minister to allow boots on the ground to ensure a properly resourced response.

### Homelessness

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:40): (2764) My adjournment matter this afternoon is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts and Minister for Homelessness Nick Staikos in the other place. The Carroll Labor government is helping Victorians who are experiencing homelessness to get back on their feet. Ten new homelessness outreach services are being delivered across Brimbank, Shepparton, Hume, Whitehorse, Latrobe, Darebin, Bairnsdale, Maribyrnong, Wodonga and the Mornington Peninsula, backed by a \$27.8 million investment. This investment underpins the government's rollout of specialist outreach homelessness services across every region in Victoria, bringing the total number of assertive outreach services to 18. Dedicated support workers will be on the ground helping rough sleepers secure stable housing, alongside vital provisions for emergency accommodation, health, social care and wraparound supports. This initiative helps vulnerable people to get the help they need and ensures that they do not slip through the cracks. The action I seek is for the minister to update me on how these new assertive outreach services can connect people in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region who may be experiencing homelessness with permanent housing and health pathways when these additional teams launch later this year.

### Education First Youth Foyers

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (15:41): (2765) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts. The action that I seek is for the minister to urgently complete the construction of the Wangaratta Education First Youth Foyer and fund new youth foyers in Bendigo and Mildura. As I near the end of my 24-year tenure in Parliament, I look back with immense pride on the Education First Youth Foyer policy, which I developed, and the delivery of the first three Education First Youth Foyers, in Broadmeadows, Glen Waverley and Shepparton. The work of the youth foyers is transformational and is good Liberal policy that helps young people build a better life by giving them a hand up rather than a handout. A study by the Brotherhood of St Laurence found that 85 per cent of foyer participants were working or engaged in further study one year after leaving the

program. The proportion living independently in their own housing increased from 7 per cent at entry to 51 per cent a year after exit.

I recently had the great pleasure of visiting the Glen Waverley foyer and attending the 10-year anniversary of the Shepparton foyer, where I heard the personal success stories of young people who were at risk of homelessness and disconnecting from education until they entered the foyer program. Through the foyer they were supported to finish school, study further and find employment, and I was proud to hear of all their achievements. I was delighted to hear that many students at the Shepparton foyer had actually gone on to buy their own homes. What an incredible story – to go from being homeless to owning a home.

Stories like that are the reason it is so disappointing to see how Labor has dropped the ball on youth foyers and failed to extend the program. In February 2023 I convinced the then Minister for Housing Richard Wynne to fund two additional Education First Youth Foyers, in Wodonga and Wangaratta. The Wodonga foyer opened in May 2025 and recently celebrated its one-year anniversary, but the Wangaratta foyer, which was funded at the same time, is stuck in limbo after several delays and still has not even begun construction. Instead of transforming young lives in Wangaratta, the government has wasted 3½ years, and it is time to get on and complete the Wangaratta foyer as soon as possible.

I have repeatedly called for two more regional youth foyers, in Bendigo and Mildura. I met with Bendigo TAFE executives and heard they have identified a building suited for rapid refurbishment, and they are excited about the prospect of being an educational partner in an Education First Youth Foyer. But Labor has shown no interest in the project. The Foyer Foundation has identified Mildura as a priority site in Victoria, a city where hundreds of young people are experiencing homelessness. It is time these two projects, which are both shovel-ready, were funded by the Labor government.

### **Taylors Road**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (15:44): (2766) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it is in relation to the critical need for road infrastructure in the west. The action I specifically seek is that the government declare Taylors Road to be a major arterial road and that it be duplicated. But firstly, I want to take a moment to give a shout-out to the Leakes Needs Lights campaign, because it is always heartening to see a community campaign finally achieving its goals. The Leakes Needs Lights campaign was brought to our notice by the wonderful Donna Southern. Donna, a Rockbank resident, approached our office about 18 months ago seeking support for a campaign to install lights at this incredibly dangerous intersection on Leakes Road. Donna, along with fellow resident Robyn Kennedy, worked tirelessly on this campaign, organising a public protest, rallying community members to meet with and write to ministers and capturing the attention of the local media. Recently Donna rang to thank me and my team for our support and to pass on the welcome news that the Leakes Road intersection is finally getting the much-needed lights installed. They are technically temporary traffic lights but will be integrated with the network and will also have cameras monitoring the traffic flow. There are some outstanding questions around the timing of the installation, which I will take up directly with the minister, but this is a great example of what can be achieved through community-led action. Congratulations to all the residents who worked so hard on this campaign.

A major community priority now is to fix Taylors Road, with residents working together to highlight a dangerous stretch of road and calling for government action. Initially designed to carry around 700 vehicles per hour during peak times, Taylors Road is currently carrying up to 2000 vehicles, causing congestion, long delays, rat-running through local streets and more and more accidents. The 1.4-kilometre stretch between Kings Road and Gilson College has a particularly high rate of accidents. There is a high level of both community and commuter outrage, supported by vocal advocacy from the City of Brimbank, at the state of this road. The action I seek is for the minister to declare Taylors Road a major arterial road and to commit to its duplication. This would significantly ease these issues, reducing travel times and resulting in a 70 per cent reduction in accidents.

### Crime

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:47): (2767) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General. On Tuesday a mother from Phillip Island and her three children were walking down Spencer Street. A man assaulted her 10-year-old son, and when she intervened he put her in a headlock and stabbed her with a pair of scissors until a passer-by tackled him to the ground. This happened outside the Victoria Police Centre. Police say the man was known to them in Victoria and Western Australia. He is in custody, and I will say nothing further about him while the investigation is ongoing.

But these violent incidents have become far too frequent, a grim, grim pattern that we in Victoria do not need to accept. In October a chef, Wan Lai, was stabbed in the chest on Little Bourke Street on her way to work. The *Age* reported the accused was already on bail, with nine priors for failing to appear and 16 warrants for the same. Two months later the Supreme Court granted her bail again. On 1 August Van Viet Truong, a grocer in Sunshine, went to help a shop worker and was dragged to the ground. He died four days later. Of the young people charged, three are on bail. Mr Truong had told a Brimbank councillor months before the fatal attack that he feared for the safety of that street.

Constituents across my region frequently – I mean very frequently – relay to me similar concerns. There are many more crimes that go unreported. They simply want to walk to the station, open their business or take their children into the city without wondering whether they are going to see their loved ones again or if there is going to be trouble. They are asking the government for basic safety from violence, which is the first job of any government – to protect its citizens.

The Labor government, while continuing to make announcements saying that it will keep Victorians safe from crime, is overseeing a crime epidemic that it has not been able to get ahead of; in fact it has effectively, over the last three or four years, exacerbated considerably. If this government is keeping Victorians safe, why is it that Victoria Police currently has 1500 vacancies and why has crime climbed 30 per cent since Labor removed PSOs from 119 train stations? Why are key police stations across metropolitan Melbourne not open 24 hours a day? You have overseen a crime crisis that has Victorians rightfully worried.

The action I seek is that the Attorney-General take real steps to protect Victorians by adopting the tough-on-crime policies that we on this side of the house have put forward, amending the Bail Act 1977 so that anyone charged with a violent offence while on bail stays in custody and putting PSOs back on train stations. The plan exists; only the government will not pick it up.

### Construction industry

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:50): (2768) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Premier. He has called a royal commission into the corruption that has occurred with the Suburban Rail Loop and the problems that have occurred with the corrupt siphoning off of money to a whole range of different groups – to unions, especially the CFMEU, but to others as well. I want to pick up the comments of Deborah Glass, the former Ombudsman, and Robert Redlich, the former IBAC Commissioner. I particularly had a lot to do with Robert Redlich when he was in that position, and I have the highest regard for him. Indeed he is a former Labor man and a former Supreme Court judge. The points that they have made are very reasonable, and I want to draw attention to a couple of these.

They say the terms of reference are strong on one hand but that there are weaknesses in those terms of reference. I want to pick up those points and ask the Premier to fix the terms of reference to make sure that the terms of reference are picking up the best independent expert advice on what is needed. They say they need to examine whether the government created the conditions for this corruption, sidestepping its own planning rules in the pursuit of vote-winning policies. They say:

The terms of reference include examining the role of executive government, which includes ministers and public servants, in its oversight and governance of major construction projects ...

and this, whilst not counted out from the terms of reference, is not quite as sharply specified in the terms of reference. They go on:

While this is not specified, we would expect that the executive government responsibility for oversight and governance ... should encompass the requirements of a proper business case ...

There was not one for the SRL. The former Premier called it an investment case, not a business case. That is what he said on radio – not a business case; an investment case. An investment case, he said, is something you do when you know what you are doing. You are not looking at other options. That is what he said – extraordinary, corrupt.

The point here is the impartial public service advice was bypassed. The transport department did not know about the SRL. They got the surprise, as everyone else did, when the announcement was made. There was an open letter sent by a number of important groups, the Transport Action Group, Michael Buxton, the Public Transport Users Association and Rail Futures, and they pointed to the failure to adhere to statutory planning requirements in developing and approving major projects, cutting corners, costing the public billions and billions of dollars in squandered money and allowing money to be siphoned off corruptly:

Our key concern is that the transport and land use planning process has been captured by political and commercial interests at the expense of the public interest.

They single out unions as part of this too. Glenyys Romanes, who I know and many in this chamber may know, pointed to the problems with the West Gate Tunnel. Michael Buxton said it is important, critical – *(Time expired)*

### Hume Freeway

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:53): (2769) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek refers to the Hume Freeway and, in particular, the lack of lighting along the Hume Freeway in my electorate. Residents across our community have raised significant concerns with me regarding the dangerous lack of lighting along the Hume Freeway, specifically the corridor of the Hume Freeway between the Metropolitan Ring Road and Donnybrook Road, which is frequently without adequate lighting, in many cases due to faulty lights along the road. This ongoing failure poses a significant safety risk for residents driving along the Hume Freeway at night. It is not acceptable that residents are forced to drive in such conditions on a major freeway, all because of inadequate and faulty lighting.

As we know, many residents use the Hume as a local road because of the lack of investment into other north–south connecting roads in the area. Something needs to be done immediately about the Hume. It is a huge problem in my electorate. I particularly want to acknowledge Hume City Council's advocacy on this and my friend the deputy mayor Ally Watson, who has written to the government seeking answers on why large chunks of the Hume remain largely unlit. Unfortunately, this issue is not isolated. It is part of a much broader issue on the lack of transport infrastructure in Victoria under this Labor government. Time and time again we see Labor neglecting our basic infrastructure, particularly in my electorate in the northern suburbs, so they can spend tens of billions of dollars, probably up to \$60 billion, on a rail tunnel from Cheltenham to Box Hill. That is not much use to my constituents in the northern suburbs, who definitely want safer roads and a safer Hume to travel on.

I seek the action of the minister to explain why much of the Hume Freeway remains unlit and seek the action of the minister to urgently fix the issue to ensure our major roads are properly lit for the safety of every driver and every constituent. While Pothole Paul is at it, he could fix the potholes on the Hume. I travel up to New South Wales every now and then. You can tell the difference between the Victorian side of the Hume and the New South Wales side of the Hume by the amount of potholes. It is absolutely ridiculous along the Hume. It is unsafe to drive on. Potholes are consistently opening up. This government cannot keep blaming weather when they have not done the resurfacing works, which

is why a Wilson government will invest \$5 billion into our roads over the next four years to eliminate 1 million potholes and to do the resurfacing works.

### Health system

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:56): (2770) My adjournment this afternoon is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it relates to sentinel events. The government continues to operate with an astounding level of secrecy. This week we learned of the depths they will go to, with their secret tax on the Suburban Rail Loop – an appalling tax on every Victorian commuter, who did not even know it existed, and which was being hidden by senior members of the Allan, Andrews and now Carroll government, and no more so than by the Premier himself, who was the Minister for Public Transport back in 2021 when it came into existence. Victorians really do deserve to know what is going on, whether it is exposing the outright issues around these secret taxes or what is happening in our health system. In relation to sentinel events, I want to understand what is being done to address the gaps in data that compromise the timely delivery of high-quality care for Victorian patients.

I am going to just refer to a terrible incident. As reported recently, Debra Buchanan was admitted to the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital for a routine surgical procedure to remove a cancerous skin tag. On waking she was haemorrhaging, and she learned that a large part of her external genitalia had been removed. She has been left permanently disfigured as a result of having the wrong operation performed on her after the hospital mixed her up with another patient with the same first name. This is a terrible story, an extreme example of a shocking mishap event in our hospitals. Nevertheless it highlights the issue around sentinel events and why we must understand what is going on so we can prevent another issue like this from occurring again. The most recent sentinel event annual report from Safer Care Victoria, which was set up after the taskforce that was undertaken back in 2016 to look at all these issues, was for the financial year 2023–24 and was released on 6 June 2025. At that time there were 193 sentinel events recorded for the year 2023–24. As I said, Premier Ben Carroll has vowed to deliver transparency and accountability, but quite seriously you cannot believe anything he says given what we have just seen on display this week. The action I seek is that the government release this important data in the sentinel events annual report 2024–25, because Victorians deserve to have confidence in our health system.

### Responses

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (15:59): A number of members have raised a number of matters. Before I turn to those, two matters were raised for my attention. Firstly, Ms Ermacora raised a matter in relation to toy libraries, and she asked how many families access toy libraries and about the benefit of toy libraries. I would refer Ms Ermacora to my ministers statement from earlier today, which was an update from the house on the latest round of \$360,000 for toy libraries across Victoria, including supporting 46 toy libraries with up to \$10,000 to buy new toys and attract new members, as well as setting up two new toy libraries. I would say that toy libraries across the state benefit more than 56,000 people, as measured, although I am sure indirectly it is many, many more. That is about 16,000 families. In particular, in relation to the district that Ms Ermacora represents, I know that – again, I referred to the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative in the house earlier today – there is a new toy library being set up in her district. Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative will set up a new toy library. Additionally, Mpower, Surf Coast Toy Library, Platypus Toy Library, Grovedale Toy Library, Geelong West Toy Library and Ocean Grove Toy Library are all existing services that will receive \$6000 each. I thank Ms Ermacora for her interest and her support for her local organisations and the broader work of toy libraries across the state.

Ms Gray-Barberio also raised a matter for me. I would note that, while I am here to answer her question, Ms Gray-Barberio did not stay to hear the answer. I can advise that the Victorian government tabled its response to the *Yoorrook for Justice* report on 3 April 2024, that work is progressing against recommendations 11 and 12 and that Djirra are, importantly, a part of the working group working with

the department in relation to those recommendations and ensuring that work continues in relation to the issues that Ms Gray-Barberio seemed to be raising; although she is not here to hear the response.

Mr Luu raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services. Mr Berger raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans. Mr McGowan raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services. Ms Purcell raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. Ms Terpstra raised a matter for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts and Minister for Homelessness. Ms Lovell also raised a matter for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts and Minister for Homelessness; although I note that she said that she advocated in February 2023 to Minister Wynne. Minister Wynne retired from the ministry in 2022, so I was a bit perplexed by that, but I will pass her advocacy on this occasion onwards. Mr Ettershank raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Mr Welch raised a matter for the Attorney-General. Mr Davis raised a matter for the Premier. Mr Mulholland raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Ms Crozier raised a matter for the Minister for Health. I will refer them accordingly.

**House adjourned 4:03 pm.**