



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 14 August 2025

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lister, John ⁷	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ⁸	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁹	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ¹⁰	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹¹	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁸ Resigned 6 January 2025

⁹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹⁰ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹¹ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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Thursday 14 August 2025

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Business of the house**Notices of motion and orders of the day**

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notices of motion 70 to 81 and orders of the day 4, 8 and 9, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents**Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 70.

Motions**Motions by leave**

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for failing to immediately cancel an individual's working with children check after he was dismissed from a childcare centre for sexual misconduct, including grooming toddlers. This morning, that working with children check for that individual is still active and he can still work with children.

Leave refused.

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

That this house notes that as of 14 August the Premier is still yet to debate the notice of motion given on 30 July 2025 in so-called support of the Jewish community.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY: I move, by leave:

That this house notes the vacuum on the government frontbench on 14 August, with six members not appearing at the commencement of the day.

Leave refused.***Business of the house*****Adjournment**

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

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 26 August 2025.

Motion agreed to.***Members statements*****Domenic Marchione**

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): It has been a big month in the local community, full of community spirit, celebration and connection. What began very much as a bittersweet moment was the retirement of local legend Domenic

Marchione, pharmacist and owner of Domenic Marchione Pharmacy at the Centreway in East Keilor. Domenic completed nearly 30 years of dedicated service to our local community and surrounding areas. He is hanging up his white coat, but the warmth, the commitment, the care and the legacy he has shown to our local community are truly outstanding. We are very much sad to see him go, but we wish him all the very best for his well-earned rest with his family.

Niddrie electorate

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): I was also very proud to be part of two pop-ups recently in East Keilor and Keilor. These events are always a valuable opportunity to hear directly from the residents about the issues that matter to them. I thank everyone who came by for a chat.

Airport West Football Club

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:37): Another highlight was the official unveiling of the Rob Smith scoreboard at Airport West Football Club's home ground, often referred to as 'the Nest'. Rob was a proud life member of the club, a passionate advocate for local sport and a driving force behind securing the new lights and scoreboard at the Nest. It was a heartfelt celebration of his legacy. I know he would have been very proud to see how far the club has come and to see that his family were part of that special day.

National Tree Day

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:38): I am also grateful to be engaged with a such a wonderful local community, in particular Moonee Valley City Council, Moonee Valley Sustainability and Friends of Steele Creek, who did a national tree-planting day recently on the banks of the Maribyrnong River.

Maroondah Winter Shelter

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:38): I rise today to speak about the wonderful work that the Winter Shelter does in supporting vulnerable members of our community in the Maroondah area. The Winter Shelter homelessness program runs from June until the end of August. Each night of the week a local church opens their doors to provide a safe place for men who are experiencing homelessness, with somewhere warm to sleep, a shower to get clean, food to fill empty stomachs, companionship and support. Once the winter period is over the Winter Shelter continues their work by providing meals a couple of nights a week for those in the community who are in need. Gitta Clayton, along with over 250 volunteers, works tirelessly to ensure these programs run as seamlessly as possible. A lot of care, consideration, compassion and respect are shown towards all guests who attend. I have had the pleasure of helping a couple of times during the wintertime, and two of my staff volunteer their time regularly to provide the support that is so desperately needed. On the tail end of Homelessness Week, it would be a perfect world if there was not any homelessness. However, the reality of that is far from happening. In the meantime, I thank these kind and caring volunteers who work around the clock to improve the quality of life of those who need a little extra support.

Mill Park electorate mental health services

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:39): I rise today to speak about the important growth of mental health services in and near my electorate of Mill Park. I am pleased to say that the mental health and wellbeing local in Whittlesea was one of the first to be established in Victoria, in 2022, following the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. It was also great to welcome the Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt in the other place to the South Morang site recently to mark the second intake of the early career and graduate program. These passionate and talented graduates are helping to shape the future of Victoria's mental health workforce, making sure we have accessible services and dedicated health professionals living and

working in the north. I thank all those working in this space for their commitment and compassion, and I look forward to seeing this sector continue to grow in the local area.

Mill Park Secondary College

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:40): I recently had the pleasure of attending the Mill Park Secondary College's school production of *Bring It On: The Musical*. The students delivered an outstanding performance showcasing their talent and dedication after countless hours of rehearsal and preparation. The musical was held at the impressive 400-seat performing arts centre, funded by the Labor government's \$11.6 million investment and recently opened by the Deputy Premier, who is here at the table. This venue stands as a testament to our commitment to fostering creativity and ensuring students have the opportunity to pursue their passion for the arts in state-of-the-art facilities.

Community safety

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:41): Can the Allan Labor government tell Victorians if it is truly spending \$13 million on collection bins for machetes, then parking them in front of cameras at a police station and asking felons – past, present and emerging – to roll up and have their pictures taken as they hand in their vicarious weapons of choice? Please could Parliament tell me exactly who thought this was a good idea and good use of taxpayers money? Absolutely something needs to be done about violent attacks, but a bin in front of a police station with CCTV is nothing but a PR stunt. Right now with the gun amnesty anyone can walk into the nearest firearms dealer and surrender weapons and ammunition over the counter for free. Right now in my electorate alone, if the Allan government has a spare \$13 million, it could rebuild the grossly inadequate toilets at the Swan Hill secondary college, buy the urgently needed pumper for the Koondrook fire brigade or offset the ridiculous \$850,000 to add one ramp to a hydrotherapy pool at the specialist school, or – shock, horror – the \$13 million could be used to fill police vacancies in my electorate so there are more police on the beat to protect Victorians from violent attacks and theft. But as the government has announced, the collection bins will be installed in my electorate – that means Echuca and Swan Hill – for three months. Will we be truthfully told how many weapons are actually surrendered at these towns, and will we be told if people accidentally mistake them for charity bins and how many pairs of jeans or windcheaters are also surrendered?

Working from home

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:42): Working from home works; it works for families, and it is good for the economy. Thirty-five per cent of Victorians already work from home, and that includes many of my constituents in the seat of Macedon. Whether they are from Gisborne, Riddells Creek, Romsey or Daylesford, work from home is giving working families more time with their loved ones and less time on the train or in traffic. When we give workers back their time to be parents, to be carers and to be volunteers – just to live – we create a fairer Victoria for everyone. It is not just good for workers themselves; it brings life to our towns, with more workers shopping local and visiting our amazing cafes in places like Kyneton, in Trentham and in Woodend. Now, we know that not everyone can work from home, but everyone can benefit. We know that more people working from home means less cars on the Calder Freeway and less commuters on the V/Line. The message from the Allan Labor government to my constituents in Macedon is clear: the Allan Labor government will make working from home a right, not a request. That is why we will work to enshrine it in law. If you can reasonably do your job from home, you will have the right to do so for at least two days a week, because our Labor government is on your side.

Early childhood education and care

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (09:44): I went to kindergarten at Bennett Road Kindergarten in Horsham, a great kindergarten, as the member for Lowan would attest to. My two sisters did child

care and kinder in Horsham and my brother did kinder and child care there, so what has happened with convicted sex offender Ronald Marks could have happened to us. Indeed it could have happened to any of my kids or our kids or your kids. But what has happened there with him attending the Walk for Reconciliation in Horsham as recently as May 2015 and with the failed oversight by this government of the working with children check system, to the point where the working with children check was still active as of this morning, is absolutely disgraceful. So I continue with my colleagues to call on this government to take urgent action in this space.

Mornington electorate crime

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (09:45): On crime, my chief of staff Donna actually attended the Mornington Peninsula neighbourhood policing forum yesterday in Hastings. Sadly, Mornington Peninsula crime has surged by over 24 per cent in the last year, far above the state average. This is a direct consequence of Labor's weakening of bail laws, lack of funding for frontline police resources, reduced police reception hours and more. Yesterday as well Daniel, who occasionally works in my office, had his car stolen out of his garage in Capel Sound with his wheelchair in the front, as I mentioned in Parliament yesterday. This was a heartless attack and has left him highly distressed and immobilised. However, I know the police are doing the best that they can, and I would like to thank Inspector Terry Rowlands, who has left the role of Mornington Peninsula local area commander in the last day.

Diamond Valley Foodshare

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:45): I rise today to acknowledge a significant organisation in my electorate and the incredible work of Diamond Valley Foodshare, who have been helping our community's most vulnerable people since 1992. Each year the group provides around 50,000 meals to those in need, with around 400 individuals receiving meals in any given month. I would like to especially acknowledge two outstanding volunteers Kerrie Boyle and Sue Ioannidis, who were recently honoured for their outstanding efforts at the 2025 Jagajaga Community Volunteer Awards run by federal MP Kate Thwaites. I know the member for Eltham was there to recognise their service as well. Kerrie has been volunteering with Diamond Valley Foodshare for nearly six years, currently holding the title of roster secretary. Kerrie's contribution to this organisation is described as being invaluable, as she is constantly presenting new ideas and solving issues, making everyone feel cared for and included. Sue has dedicated the last seven years to volunteering for Diamond Valley Foodshare. She constantly demonstrates her kindness, energy and passion in her role as shared secretary. Sue exemplifies the volunteer spirit and regularly spends her weeks packing food and taking on extra tasks when needed. I would like to thank Kerrie, Sue and the entire team of volunteers at Diamond Valley Foodshare for their compassion, their commitment and the lasting impact that they leave on thousands of community members. Our community is truly a better place for their work.

David Bromley

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (09:47): Pahran is truly at the heart of Melbourne's art scene, and one of its greatest contributors is the remarkable David Bromley, our very famous artist. Over the past 20 years David's work has earned widespread acclaim, both here in Australia and internationally. He now has an exhibition, *Forever Young*, which opens on Friday 15 August and celebrates the rock-and-roll spirit of the 1960s and the 80s, inspired by the photography of Colin Beard. I am looking forward to seeing Bromley's unique creative work once again.

Parliament Prize

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (09:47): As you know, the annual Parliament Prize took place, where students submitted a 90-second video delivering their own members statement. Congratulations to Amelia Tsilfidis from the beautiful Melbourne Girls Grammar school in my electorate, who placed third in the years 10 to 12 category. Well done, Amelia. Perhaps one day we will see you in the chamber.

Aged Care Employee Day

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (09:48): It was a pleasure to mark Aged Care Employee Day with Ageing Australia, visiting three fantastic centres in my local area. In our community there was Australian Unity, Mecwacare Malvern and Bolton Clarke. I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work and dedication of aged care staff across all roles, from clinical to care teams, hospitality, administration, maintenance and volunteers, who keep working in these facilities.

Merrifield Panthers Sporting Association

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:48): I rise to acknowledge an exciting development in the Kalkallo electorate's growing sports scene, with the launch of the Merrifield Panthers football club's new women's senior team and girls junior team. This expansion is a fantastic step forward for the club and the local community. It reflects the increasing demand for inclusive and accessible sporting opportunities in our region, and it is wonderful to see Merrifield Panthers responding with such energy and vision. The new teams will give more residents an opportunity to get involved in football, build skills, stay active and connect with others.

Community sport plays a vital role in fostering resilience, teamwork and a sense of belonging, and these new pathways will help strengthen those values across Kalkallo. The Panthers have quickly become a key part of our local sporting landscape, offering a space where players, families and supporters come together to celebrate sport and build community spirit. The addition of these teams will further enhance the club's reach and impact, creating more opportunities for participation and growth. At the heart of this progress is club director Paul Higginson, whose leadership and commitment to community development is truly commendable. Paul has worked tirelessly to build a club culture that is welcoming, supportive and focused on participation and development.

This football club is part of the ever-growing overarching Merrifield Panthers Sporting Association, which now includes cricket, basketball, tennis and football. Thanks also to president Glenn Herring and all of the committee, as well as the volunteers, who make Merrifield Panthers possible. I wish all the players every success as all the clubs continue to grow.

Casterton school bus services

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:50): Unfortunately I have yet another example of the Allan Labor government's failure to listen to local people, and this time it is around the Casterton school bus runs, where the city-centric Labor government have focused on merging a number of bus runs that will leave our Victorian students worse off. There are proposals at the moment to put massive, large school buses on narrow, winding and dangerous country roads. It is simply inappropriate. This is something that families have raised as an issue, schools have raised as an issue and the bus operators have raised as an issue, and yet the government simply is not listening. We need the government to step up. I urge the Minister for Education to review this urgent situation at Casterton, where bus routes may be lost. We might see that families are instead taking their children to school in South Australia, where they work, rather than having to travel 50 minutes to drop kids off to a school bus run and then the kids have to travel even further. We need to support people who live in rural and regional areas. The people of Casterton deserve more focus and to be heard, which is not happening by Labor at the moment.

Sheepvention

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:51): I recently attended Hamilton Sheepvention, a fabulous two-day rural expo. It was wonderful to meet with local exhibitors and meet with the Sheepvention and the pastoral and agricultural society, who do an incredible job on putting that event on. So many people from across Victoria came to Hamilton. There was a clear message: scrap the tax, Labor.

Viewbank College

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:51): I was at *Mamma Mia!* at Viewbank College, my old school. It is not quite so new, but we did build it under the Labor government, the performing arts centre – over \$11.5 million – at Viewbank College. It was a great performance of *Mamma Mia!* last week by the Viewbank College students. They looked like they were just having a great time and really enjoying it. To the cast, the crew and the production team, it was just an extraordinary effort. To the parents and friends of Viewbank College who supported that production, I want to thank them as well and everyone who got along to see the great work of the Viewbank College students. They are just so talented, and I was really pleased to go back there to see this year's production.

Mercy Hospital for Women

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:52): Also I want to acknowledge the \$1.36 million that the government has provided to Mercy Hospital for Women in Heidelberg, particularly for our NICU beds. We ended up with an additional 32 cots being replaced. This is really important work. I want to give heartfelt thanks to the hardworking healthcare heroes at Mercy Health for leading such an important project and for the work they do every day. Two great hospitals, the Austin and Mercy hospitals, are on one site, built by our government. The services that are provided there are topnotch. So many families have babies there at the Mercy in Heidelberg, and why wouldn't they? It is a brilliant hospital with amazing people. The NICU beds there are just critical.

Land tax

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:53): I have had many in my community reach out to me because they have started receiving their new land tax bills for the first time. I am talking about people who are running small businesses and side hustles from their own homes – people the government is now charging land tax simply for backing themselves and trying to earn an income under their own roof. People running businesses from home are receiving new land tax bills of thousands of dollars. Under Labor's changes, if home-based businesses earn over \$30,000 a year, the owner can be slugged with land tax, hitting startups, side hustles, freelancers and more. If the government is already coming after those who want to make money from their own homes, my question is: is it the government's plan to legislate working from home in order to be able to tax everyday Victorians? In the Liberal Party we back working from home. We back flexibility, productivity and personal choice. However, this government's land tax on home businesses already shows they will punish ambition and enterprise. We know the government is addicted to taxes. We know that there have been 63 new or increased taxes since Labor came to office 10 years ago, and we know that we simply cannot trust them. I ask again: is it the government's plan to legislate working from home just so they can sting Victorians with yet another tax?

Philip Cachia

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:54): We have outstanding schools in my community, including St Francis Xavier Primary in Montmorency. It is a great school with a wonderful community, which has been well supported by principal Philip Cachia. I thank, congratulate and farewell Phil on his retirement after an incredible 40 years of service to education. Phil's dedication to his students, staff and the wider school community has made a lasting legacy across a number of communities, including ours. His leadership, compassion and unwavering commitment to learning have helped so many children have a strong, supportive learning environment, including at SFX. I am glad to be able to reflect on his remarkable career and celebrate the contribution he has made – not just to his school, but to the broader educational landscape. Phil's legacy is a testament to the value of investing in education and a reminder of our growth as a state that makes education a top priority. I thank Phil for his service and wish him all the best in his retirement.

Eltham electorate school leaders

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (09:55): I also want to thank the principals of the many small schools in the outer north-east who made the time to sit with the Deputy Premier and me for an important discussion about the unique joys, strengths and challenges of leading a small school community. This meeting was a valuable opportunity for principals to share their experiences directly with the Minister for Education, whose openness to listening and consideration of their concerns was greatly appreciated. I especially thank Research Primary School principal Fiona Vale for her leadership, advocacy and generosity in hosting this meeting. These leaders carry immense responsibilities, often extending beyond the school gate into the broader community. Their voices are critical in shaping how we support small schools. I am grateful for their dedication to their staff, students and the broader community, and I look forward to continuing to work with them.

Biala Ringwood

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:56): Last week I had the privilege of visiting Biala Ringwood, a remarkable program in my community that provides essential respite and support for families and children with additional needs aged from birth to six years. The word ‘biala’ is an Aboriginal term meaning ‘I understand’, and this spirit of empathy forms the core of the program. It is not just about respite for parents and carers – Biala is a safe and nurturing space where children thrive, benefiting from individualised support from a team of amazing volunteers. The dedicated staff ensure each child has the best possible care and opportunity to grow. For families facing the challenge of raising a child with additional needs, Biala offers more than practical assistance – it provides hope, connection and reassurance that they are not alone. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Biala team for their warm welcome and the incredible work they do to enrich the lives of families in Maroondah and beyond. Special thanks to Dennis, Cheryl and all the volunteers for their time and to Sammy and Zoe for the cuddles and fun during music time.

Ringwood Secondary College

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:57): I also rise with excitement to spruik the *Little Shop of Horrors* musical production at Ringwood Secondary College. I am thrilled to see the talented students in action and look forward to attending the opening night tonight. It is always a pleasure to support our local schools, and I wish them all the best. Chookas to everyone involved.

McKinnon Secondary College

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (09:57): Congratulations to McKinnon Secondary College on a practically perfect production of *Mary Poppins*. I particularly congratulate the principal cast: Jessica Sweeney, Felix De Lemos, Eden Morehu, Olivia Capurro Martinez, Honorary Leung, Tilly Parrish, Mikayla Silver, Lucy Green and Lia Erlich; and the ensemble: Milana Gavrilenko, Tara Geehman, Amelia Long, Miranda Sacks, Michaela Anderson, Ariella Liberman, Katya Blutman, Isabella Ruthven, Tamar Elboher, Eva Sun, Shiraz Elbaz, Kate Parrish, Adele Finn, Bella Schneider, Sofia Kovalenko, Lily Wever, Addison Rood, Anthony Smith, Mia Kinross, Benya Goldman, Phoebe Guidera, Sid Noble, Sophia Rusin, Kirsten Wong, Sophia Rink, Ryan Nguyen, Zoe McGrane, Elise King, Cormac Dixon, Jensen Blutman, Felix Nutting, Jackson Torres, Amy Fierstein, Isla Rood, Prisha Chatterjee, Esecosa Olaye, Ella Zin, Kassidy Warren-Smith, Sarah Lyon, Susie Ellis, Clementine Wilson, Constance Leung, Audrey Kambouris, Emma Saffer, Micaela Kelleher, Drew Tinworth, Chloe Shen, Shai Rozenberg and Sera Solomon. This being a 90-second statement, sadly I do not have time to go through the names of all the crew, but the crew work very, very hard behind the scenes and the show could not possibly go on without them. They should consider themselves collectively acknowledged. Congratulations and well done to everyone involved.

Energy policy

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:59): I want to make some comments on the agreement the government has made with Solstice Energy to end the compressed natural gas (CNG) network in 10 country towns, including Orbost and Lakes Entrance. When I asked about this in question time earlier this week, there were howls of 'Wrong'. Solstice have now stated:

... the early exit of the agreement and decommissioning of the gas networks has been agreed with the Victorian Government.

They also said the Minister for Regional Development was responsible for striking this deal. The issue remains that households in 10 regional centres, including Orbost and Lakes Entrance, face significant out-of-pocket expenses to transition from CNG to electricity. Those opting for LPG are receiving far greater support, while those choosing electricity for various reasons are being offered minimal assistance. It is just not right that they will be massively out of pocket. This has arisen because the state allowed Solstice to exit a 20-year agreement after 10 years. The government should have ensured no transition cost. Why would you sign off on such a deal? I also remind the house that just two years ago the Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio stated:

We're ensuring Victorians aren't locked into expensive fossil gas prices ... helping them switch to efficient electric appliances ...

Adding:

It's time to put gas on the backburner ...

Now the government has backed a deal to push LPG over electricity. It is running with the foxes and hunting with the hounds.

Country Fire Authority Cranbourne brigade

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:00): On Saturday night I was delighted to join the Cranbourne CFA fire brigade annual dinner and 85th anniversary alongside Mr Galea from the other place. Under the extraordinary leadership of captain Mitchell Newman, it was an honour to celebrate the contribution of Cranbourne's finest. On service awards there was Jarryd Simmons to be congratulated for 15 years, Mark Christie for 20 years, Ronald Battams for 25 years and Adam Russell for 30 years. The national medal was awarded to Brendan Wilson, and the brigade life membership for 20 years at Cranbourne went to Mark Christie. I would like to also congratulate the longest standing member of Cranbourne, Robert Lake, with 56 years of service to Cranbourne, and also say the apple does not fall far from the tree and congratulate Anthony Lake on his service and for everything else he does for Cranbourne. The member of the year as voted by the brigade membership was Steven Howard, and I would also like to congratulate Lisa Cunynghame for being a runner-up and a very important part of the crew. Firefighter of the year was also Steven Howard. I would also like to thank Christine Henderson and lieutenant Zoe Russell for their work in making the evening so special. We are extraordinarily lucky to have them.

Sharon Steeden

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:01): On another matter, I would like to congratulate Sharon Steeden from Cranbourne Primary School, an education support staff member who has been serving for a very long time, particularly at the heart and soul of our library.

Rod Grigson

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:01): On another matter, I would like to congratulate the Scribe Tribe from Balla Balla for their third anthology as published by Rod Grigson, not just an extraordinary author and an amazing publisher but also, as it turns out, a really rock-solid neighbour. It is great to have such clever people.

Ripon electorate Landcare

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:02): Last week was Landcare Week, and I was proud to host a special morning tea to recognise local Landcare volunteers from across the Ripon electorate. Thank you to all who came, including volunteers from the Upper Mount Emu Creek Landcare Network, Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Network, Clunes Landcare Group, Natta Yallock Landcare Group, Mount Cole–Pyrenees Nature Group, Lexton Landcare Group, Moolort Landcare Group, Avon Plains Banyena Landcare Group and the Stewart Park committee in Skipton. It was a lovely opportunity to stop and thank Landcare volunteers for all that they have done for our rural communities, putting in countless hours over many years to better our environment. As co-convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of Landcare I am proud to support local groups and will continue to work hard to make sure that they are supported more into the future.

Ripon electorate housing

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:02): Last week our Labor government also announced more affordable housing is coming to our region. Round 2 of the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund is delivering 25 new homes for workers in Ararat, nine new homes for workers in St Arnaud and eight new homes for workers in Maryborough. This is huge for our country communities, and I want to congratulate E2E Growth Consultants and Elmstone Property Group, who will kick off construction of these new homes very soon. Labor is truly delivering for our regions, with redeveloped hospitals, new childcare centres, more train services and now more affordable housing to boost our local economies too.

Hastings electorate ministerial visit

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:03): Firstly, I would like to thank Minister Stitt for coming out to my electorate and meeting with several groups that covered all of her ministerial portfolios. Our first meeting was with the Peninsula Advisory Committee for Elders, specifically to talk about issues of elder abuse. We then dropped down to the Kindred Clubhouse to talk about the work they do supporting people with various mental health issues, and we heard firsthand from club members how important the club is to them. Lastly, we visited Sikh Volunteers Australia and toured their amazing kitchen, capable of pumping out 8000 meals a day, and also had a look at their food truck, which had recently returned from supporting those affected by the devastating floods in Taree, New South Wales.

Helping Hands Mission

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:04): On another matter, I would like to congratulate everyone at Helping Hands for setting up their food pantry at the seniors hall on Worwong Avenue in Somerville and also give a massive thankyou to all those people and businesses that have so generously donated equipment and of course lots of food.

Western Port Community Support

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:04): On another matter, I would like to do a big shout-out to Colm from Western Port Community Support for setting up a makeshift office at Helping Hands on Wednesdays to offer free help to people who attend the pantry to find any services and assistance they may need.

NAPLAN results

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:04): Also a very big congratulations to all of the schools in Victoria for acing their NAPLAN results, the best results in Victorian history.

Port of Hastings

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:04): Lastly, the federal government has confirmed the proposed Victorian renewable energy terminal will proceed to environmental assessment under the Environment

Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This is fantastic news for Hastings, for Victoria and for renewable energy.

Pines Football Netball Club

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:05): A big congratulations to the Pines football club on their 60th anniversary. I attended a huge party last week. It was well attended, and we even opened up and cut the ribbon on a new, named grandstand. The clubrooms were rebuilt in partnership with Frankston City Council not long ago, but it is still a celebration for any club to reach 60 years.

Archie Wilson

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:05): I also want to give a huge shout-out to Frankston's superboot. Many people in this chamber would have seen on the news last night we have a new champion in Frankston, Archie Wilson, who is becoming a punter for Nebraska. He seems like an awesome kid and an all-round great character. Let us rally behind him and send him the local love. He is going to be a home-town hero, I am sure. He joins a group of many, many VFL and AFL football players that come from Frankston and the peninsula. We have a great legacy of breeding champions on the peninsula. Exporting them to the US is something a little bit new in the football sense. We have done it before with basketball, but we are very, very proud and wish Archie Wilson all the best in his journey.

Pakistan Independence Day

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:06): Today is Pakistan Independence Day, and I wish my large Pakistani diaspora a very, very happy day, and I hope they enjoy celebrations together. I also have the pleasure of hosting His Excellency Mr Wajid Hassan Hashmi, the new Consul General of Pakistan to Victoria, in Parliament today, and I welcome him and his lovely wife to Melbourne. I thank my good friend Hassaan Gul for organising today's meeting. I am really looking forward to discussing the important issues and opportunities to strengthen relations between Pakistan and Victoria to support the diaspora living here. I really hope everyone has a wonderful day today, coming together and celebrating all the great contributions that our Pakistani community has made.

Bills

Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:07): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Australian Grands Prix Amendment Bill 2025:

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

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

Overview

The main purposes of this Bill are to amend the *Australian Grands Prix Act 1994* (the **Act**):

- to extend the maximum duration of the race period from 7 to 21 days;
- to provide for the declaration of public access areas within the declared area;
- to update the definition of 'grand prix insignia';
- to increase the maximum payment that the Australian Grand Prix Corporation (the **Corporation**) can make to the committee of management under section 41 of the Act;

- to allow the Corporation to host non-motor sport events or the Australian Formula One Grand Prix (**Grand Prix**) events approved by the Minister;
- to provide for the appointment of acting members and an acting chairperson to the Corporation; and
- to update gendered language and make other minor and consequential amendments.

Human Rights Issues

The human rights that are relevant to the Bill include:

- recognition and equality before the law (section 8);
- freedom of movement (section 12);
- privacy (section 13(a)); and
- property (section 20).

Updating terminology

Clauses 16, 17, 27 and 28 of the Bill amends sections 11, 12, 44 and 51 of the Act by replacing references to 'his' and 'her' and 'he' and 'she' with non-gendered terms, such as 'the person' and 'the Minister'.

Recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. This component of the right ensures that laws and policies are applied equally and do not have a discriminatory effect.

'Discrimination' under the Charter has the same meaning as in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. Discrimination includes direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of an attribute listed in section 6 of that Act (which includes a person's gender identity and sex characteristics).

The Bill promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law by removing gendered language and replacing it with non-gendered terms. These amendments promote the right by removing exclusionary language and clarifying that the provisions in these Act are inclusive of all persons, including non-binary persons.

Extension of race period

Clause 22 of the Bill amends section 27 of the Act, which currently empowers the Minister responsible for administering the Act, acting jointly with the Minister responsible for administering the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 (Crown Land Act)*, to declare a race period not exceeding 7 days in relation to the 'declared area', being all or part of Albert Park, and other land surrounded by it. Relevantly, section 30 of the Act requires the Corporation to manage and control the declared area, section 32 allows the Corporation to fence or cordon off the whole or any part of the declared area, and section 33 authorises the closure of any (part of a) road within the declared area, for the duration of the race period. Specifically, clause 22 amends section 27(b) of the Act to extend the maximum duration for which the race period can be declared from 7 to 21 days.

Freedom of Movement (section 12)

Section 12 of the Charter relevantly provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria. The right extends, generally, to freedom to move throughout the State without impediment or restrictions (both physical and procedural) and a right to access places and services used by members of the public. However, this right is not absolute and may be subject to such reasonable limitations as are demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society, including the property rights of others and restrictions legitimately made in the public interest.

The effect of the above amendment to extend the duration of the race period is to increase the length of the existing restrictions on public access to, and use of, Albert Park, which is Crown land reserved under the Crown Land Act for the purpose of a public park. This amendment may further restrict public access to the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre (MSAC), Lakeside Stadium, Albert Park driving range, and various sporting clubs and businesses. To the extent that the amendment excludes or limits public access to public places, it may interfere with the right to freedom of movement.

However, this amendment serves an important and legitimate public safety objective. While the maximum duration for which the race period can be declared under the Act has not changed since its commencement in 1994, the scope of work involved in hosting the Grand Prix has changed significantly over this period, including a significant growth in attendance levels and a corresponding rise in operational and infrastructure requirements. The expanded scope of the event has increased the scale of, and time required for, erecting and

dismantling the event. The effect of this escalation is the requirement for works to be increasingly undertaken outside the 7-day race period. The greater presence and activity of construction machinery and vehicles for the purpose of erecting and dismantling significant infrastructure outside of the race period creates safety risks for pedestrians and cyclists. Therefore, the amendment to extend the maximum duration that public access is restricted in the declared area is necessary to appropriately prepare the site for the Grand Prix and protect the general public from safety risks posed by the works, thereby facilitating the safety of local residents and the wider community.

Further, section 30 of the Act already provides for the continued operation of most venues and businesses within the declared area. For example, Lakeside Stadium, the Albert Park driving range, and the MSAC are likely to remain at least partially open with some alternative access arrangements. Additionally, members of the general public will continue to have access to numerous sporting clubs and venues, which will not be affected by the extended race period.

Further, to mitigate the impact of this reform on the freedom of movement, clause 6 of the Bill inserts new section 27A, which allows the Corporation to declare specified areas within the declared area to be a public access areas, and specify the dates and times during which the public may have access to these areas during the race period. These new powers will be subject to notification and consultation requirements and Ministerial oversight (ss 27C and 27G). This amendment thereby minimises the impact of the increased access restrictions on the general public, so that any limitations on the freedom of movement go no further than reasonably necessary to achieve the purpose of the Bill.

Therefore, while the Bill limits the right of members of the public to move freely within and through Albert Park, it is aimed at balancing public safety, operational and contractual requirements with the rights of local residents and the wider community to access public spaces and services, including recreational facilities and parks. Further, the limitation is time bound (up to 21 days a year) and is necessary to enable the Corporation to safely deliver the event. Further, the Bill strengthens existing measures in the Act to limit the restrictions on movement to the least restrictive means available to safely host the Grand Prix, facilitating public access insofar as the event build and dismantle allows.

Accordingly, in my view, the Bill is not incompatible with the right to freedom of movement under section 12 of the Charter.

Restrictions on access affecting business operations

Section 30 of the Act requires the Corporation to manage and control the declared area, and provides that the rights and interests of any person in relation to the declared area are suspended for the duration of the race period. As the Bill extends the maximum duration of the race period, it consequently extends the period that affected persons' rights and interests are suspended.

However, section 30 further provides that a person who ordinarily has the right to carry on a business in premises within the declared area, being a premises in which they have a right of occupation, may continue to operate the business to the extent and in accordance with the conditions set by the Corporation, after consulting the committee of management. Clause 13 amends this provision to further require the Corporation to have regard to the operational requirements and safety considerations of the Grand Prix, and the access required by business owners in order to carry on the business (whether at full or reduced capacity) (cl 14, new s30A), in determining these conditions.

Commercial tenants will, therefore, be variably impacted by the extended race period, either experiencing limited operation and/or alternative access arrangements, or being required to cease operations altogether for the extended 21-day race period.

As such, the extended restrictions may be relevant to the property and privacy rights of the commercial tenants within the declared area. However, only natural persons have Charter rights, while the amendments primarily apply to incorporated entities and to the commercial affairs of people, rather than to individuals. To the extent that the Bill will affect the rights of individuals (e.g. sole proprietors and members of unincorporated associations), as opposed to companies or other incorporated bodies, I discuss the relevant human rights issues below.

Right to privacy (section 13(a))

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

Although the Charter does not include an express 'right to work', there is case law which suggests that the right to privacy may include 'a right to work of some kind' where there is a sufficient impact upon the personal

relationships of an individual or on their capacity to experience a private life, for example by curtailing their ability to earn a living and maintain their identity through employment.

It is possible that for a person who operates a business, the suspension of their rights to operate their business for the extended period of 21 days, may significantly curtail their ability to earn a living. Thus, on a broad reading, the right to privacy may be engaged by the suspension of a person's rights as a result of the extended maximum duration of the race period. However, given the temporary nature of such suspension, it could not be said to be reaching the threshold of adversely affecting their ability to maintain their identity through employment.

Accordingly, I consider that any interference arising from the extended maximum duration would not be arbitrary, and therefore, that the privacy right is not limited.

Property rights (section 20)

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

For the purposes of section 20 of the Charter, 'property' includes all real property interests recognised under the general law, which extends to contractual rights. As the Bill increases the period of time that commercial tenants and sublessees' rights to operate their business may be suspended, and these rights are contractual in nature, the Bill may be relevant to a property interest.

An interference with property may amount to a deprivation in circumstances where it effectively prevents a person from using or dealing with their property. A deprivation of property includes any substantial restriction on a person's exclusive possession, use or enjoyment of their property. As amended section 27(b) extends the period that the Corporation is granted exclusive possession of the declared area, which includes certain business premises, it is likely to interfere with the property rights of persons who are deprived of the exclusive possession and use of their business premises. Further, the tenants who are required to significantly reduce or cease operating for the entire race period will experience significant disruptions to their business operations, such that they are deprived of the right to the use or enjoyment of their property.

However, the right to property will only be limited where a person is deprived of property 'other than in accordance with the law'. For a deprivation of property to be 'in accordance with the law', the law must be publicly accessible, clear and certain, and must not operate arbitrarily. In this instance, the interference will not be arbitrary, but governed by a clear and accessible process set out in the Bill and subject to reasonable conditions. For example, it can only be exercised with the approval of the Minister (s 27). Further, many affected tenants will be eligible for the existing compensation scheme, which entitles persons with businesses established before 1994, whose rights are suspended by the reason of the declared area access restrictions, to monetary compensation in accordance with section 30(5) of the Act. This provision allows for further compensation to account for the additional days of closure required under the extended race period.

Accordingly, any interference with a person's property right that results from the increased access restrictions under section 27(b), is in accordance with law. Further, the new provisions of the Bill are drafted in clear and precise terms, and are sufficiently accessible via public notice requirements. As such, I consider that the right to property is not limited by this amendment.

To the extent that the Bill limits any Charter rights, such limits are reasonable, proportionate and justifiable in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. I am satisfied that reforms introduced by this Bill are compatible with the Charter.

Steve Dimopoulos MP
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events

Second reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:08): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The *Australian Grands Prix Act 1994* (Act) has been in force for over 30 years. It empowers the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to hold the Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix (Grand Prix) at Albert Park and the

Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix (MotoGP) at Phillip Island. These events have been annual features of the Victorian major events calendar since 1996 and 1997 respectively.

The Grand Prix provides a significant contribution to the Victorian visitor economy – driving visitation and spend, contributing to the vibrancy and liveability of Victoria and promoting Melbourne and Victoria to a global audience. This event holds the record for the highest attended weekend sporting event ever staged in Melbourne.

In 2025, the Grand Prix increased Victoria's Gross State Product by \$323.9 million, generated an estimated \$3.08 in economic impact for the state for every dollar invested by the Victorian government and supported an estimated 1,631 annual full-time equivalent jobs through roles such as event construction and hospitality.

It is truly one of the biggest jewels in Victoria's major events crown and one that will remain here until at least 2037.

As with all legislation, it is important to ensure that the Australian Grands Prix Act remains fit for purpose and reflects contemporary needs. With the Grand Prix continuing to grow in popularity and complexity, this Bill makes a number of amendments to the Act to ensure the arrangements continue to support the conduct of the Grand Prix in a manner that balances the safe operation of the event with the needs of the community.

The Act currently allows for the declaration of a race period not exceeding 7 days. While this may have been adequate 30 years ago, the Grand Prix has grown significantly so the infrastructure required, and time needed to build and dismantle race infrastructure has also increased. Bigger attendances at the Grand Prix requires a bigger event footprint and more infrastructure. Consequently, the Bill proposes to increase exclusive access to Albert Park to up to 21 days. This extension to the maximum duration of the race period is critical as pedestrians and cyclists would otherwise be subjected to increasing safety risks through exposure to workers and vehicles undertaking the growing infrastructure build and dismantle. The Act provides that people carrying on business in the declared area may continue to access those parts of Albert Park during the race period, subject to the approval and conditions of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation. This will continue to apply in relation to the longer race period however the Bill requires the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to be transparent in its decision making around tenant access.

The Bill also establishes a mechanism to enable the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to allow access to Albert Park during the race period, ensuring the public continues to have as much access to the park as possible for as long as is safe to do so. The AGPC will be required to consult the minister responsible for administering the Act and publish its determinations on the Victoria Government Gazette and its website. This will ensure Victorian Government oversight of AGPC's decision-making and adequate public awareness of AGPC's determinations. The Bill also enables the AGPC to vary or revoke a determination with approval of the Minister responsible for administering the Act. Further, the AGPC can temporarily close a publicly accessible area if it considers it necessary to do so in an emergency or for public safety.

It is intended that amendments will be made to the *Australian Grands Prix (Formula One) Regulations 2016* (Regulations) to facilitate operation of public access areas.

The Bill also reduces the time for which a designated access period can be declared under the Act to compensate for a potentially increased race period. The designated access period allows the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to control small parcels of land for storage and other matters. The reduction will avoid inconsistencies between the race period and designated access period.

The definition of 'grand prix insignia' in the Act is now out of date. Some of the protected expressions are simply no longer used to promote the Grand Prix or MotoGP and the operational requirements for the events have changed over time. The Bill therefore updates the definition of 'grand prix insignia' to reflect these outcomes.

The Bill also increases the legislated payment to the committee of management for Albert Park – Parks Victoria – in recognition of the increased footprint of the Grand Prix and the additional work required from it to help stage the event, including tenant liaison and park maintenance and upkeep. The annual payment will rise from \$100,000 to \$200,000, which is roughly equivalent to adjusting the original figure for inflation. In addition, the Bill allows this compensation to be increased through the Regulations.

The Act currently only authorises the AGPC to facilitate the Grand Prix and the MotoGP, which includes ancillary activities such as concerts and parades where they are associated with the motor events. The Bill provides the Australian Grand Prix Corporation with the power to host non-motor sport events at any time, subject to the approval of the Minister. This will enable the AGPC to pursue additional avenues for raising revenue, which may reduce its reliance on government funding.

The amendments require applications from the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to host non-motor sport events to be provided 6 months in advance of the proposed event and contain essential operational and security information. The Minister may have regard to the financial sustainability of the event, operational factors and

consultation undertaken. The Minister must consider any effects on the committee of management and tenants of Albert Park if an event is proposed to be held there.

The Bill also amends governance provisions relating to the Australian Grand Prix Corporation board to allow the Minister to appoint acting members, as opposed to the Governor in Council, and allow for the appointment of an acting chairperson. These are important amendments to ensure continuity in the performance and leadership of the AGPC board.

Finally, the Bill enhances the governance and powers of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation to deliver its functions.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (10:08): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 28 August.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

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

That the consideration of government business, order of the day 2, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Parliamentary Ethics Committee

Membership

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

That Daniela De Martino, John Mullahy and Kim Wells be members of the Parliamentary Ethics Committee.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:10): I would like to make a few remarks on this motion. I want to make a few comments about this ethics committee that the Labor government is proposing to allocate members to today. Let us be really clear about what is happening here: the ethics committee is a committee that is set up to review and set the standards of behaviour and code of conduct for MPs, so it is a pretty important committee. It was set up in response to Operation Watts, which revealed industrial-scale branch stacking and roting of public funds by Labor MPs.

For years independent experts and the Greens called for a parliamentary standards commissioner and an ethics committee, and after years of delaying those calls, Labor was finally forced to introduce it. Yet today Labor has decided deliberately to only put Labor and Liberal MPs onto this committee, despite there being a huge crossbench in the Victorian Parliament. This is a highly unusual move. This will be the only joint committee in this Parliament with no representatives at all from the crossbench – no independents, no Greens, no minor parties represented. I usually try and keep my contributions in this chamber pretty respectful and reasonable, but I cannot for the life of me describe this as anything other than a protection racket. This is Labor and the Liberals deciding that they and they alone will decide on the standards of behaviour, the code of conduct and the rules for MPs' behaviour in this place. I have to say it is pretty galling because the ethics committee was set up precisely because of the rorts and the scandals uncovered through IBAC investigations into Labor MPs.

We have had many, many conversations with the government about this committee, many conversations with the Leader of the House, with the Treasurer, with the Premier, with their offices,

offering to work together with the Labor government to ensure that this committee is truly representative of this Parliament, to make sure that all MPs are able to sit down, no matter which party they come from, to discuss what we think the standards of behaviour in this place should be and what the rules and the code of conduct are. It is pretty disappointing – and that is putting it lightly – that instead of taking up the invitation to ensure that this committee is fully representative of this Parliament, Labor have decided to stitch up a deal with the Liberals and have said to us that they do not believe that the crossbench has any role here and in fact they would prefer Labor and Liberals to stitch up these deals together so they get to decide the rules for themselves.

I do not think that is respectful. I do not think it is acceptable, and I do not think that the Victorian public would think that is acceptable either. I think the Victorian public would have every right to ask why Labor and the Liberals do not want crossbenchers, Greens, independents and minor parties on the ethics committee. Is it because they might actually set standards that hold MPs accountable for their behaviour? Is it that Labor and Liberal MPs do not want to change anything about this place and they do not want to set those higher standards for MP behaviour? I think it is hubris. It is hubris for the Labor and Liberal MPs to act like they are the only two parties in this Parliament, because the simple reality of our electoral system now is that they are not.

I get that Labor and the Liberals are having difficulty adjusting to that new reality, where their primary votes are plummeting election after election and more and more crossbenchers and alternative parties are getting elected to parliaments. Instead of just accepting that this is the reality and that the Victorian public expects a certain standard from their MPs, Labor's reaction to this is to try and lock things down, to try and misuse the rules of the Parliament to lock out any voices other than their own and set up what I believe can only be described as a protection racket to lock anyone other than the two major parties out of making decisions about the standards of behaviour for MPs. I understand that they think they will get away with it because it is an internal process in Parliament and no-one is really watching Parliament. I do not think Labor will get away with it. I think that it will backfire, because integrity really does matter to the Victorian public. Election after election the Victorian public have shown that integrity is a matter that they vote on, and they want to see better standards of behaviour, whether it is here or in the federal Parliament, where this has been a huge issue.

The Victorian Greens for a long time have called for a body to investigate parliamentary misconduct and improve behavioural standards and ethics. We were repeatedly shut down by Labor and the Liberals over many, many years. In 2019 the Greens moved amendments to establish an independent parliamentary standards commissioner. They were opposed by Labor and they were opposed by the Liberals, meaning we had to wait six years, where we just had a conga line of endless ministerial scandals, before we actually got an independent commissioner. We have one now, and that is great.

In 2022 the Greens introduced a comprehensive parliamentary integrity bill that included not just the need for an integrity commission and commissioner but also proposed laws for parliamentarians' interactions with lobbyists and required cooling-off periods for MPs who are moving from their political careers into private consultancy roles. These laws were also opposed by Labor and the Liberals. Who knows how many years and how many lobbying scandals will have to occur before the old parties are once again forced to reluctantly act on the revolving door between ministers and big corporations and lobbyists that we know the public absolutely hate and which leads to such bad decisions happening and vested interests getting such preferential treatment in our state and in our country. These are the kinds of rules that we should be looking at. These are the kinds of things that could be in a code of conduct for MPs but will not get looked at now, because Labor has decided that instead of having this committee being fully representative, it will just be Labor and Liberal MPs to ensure that these kinds of things cannot be looked at. I think the public wants committees like this to look at these kinds of things, like the revolving door between lobbyists, big corporations, ministers and parliamentarians, but I think we can almost guarantee now that that will not be looked at.

The fact is that every improvement in parliamentary integrity, transparency and accountability in Victoria over the last decade has come directly or indirectly as the result of pressure from the Greens on Labor, and they have had to be pulled kicking and screaming to the table.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: I can come up with a list. I can send a list to the member for Tarneit. One of them just passed the Parliament on Tuesday night, where we had to drag Labor kicking and screaming to the table to get rid of ‘dump day’ and to have more transparency on Treasurer’s advances. If you look at all of the transparency measures – a non-government chair on the Integrity and Oversight Committee – there are numerous examples where it has only been through Greens pressure and negotiations that we have actually got more integrity laws in this place, after having been dragged kicking and screaming to improve standards and integrity in this workplace.

They did not want to do it in the first place, but now that they are having to have an ethics committee, Labor and the Liberals are trying everything in their power to ensure that the political duopoly still gets to control the rules for MPs to make sure that their exclusive, cosy little Labor and Liberal club is not actually disrupted in any way. We know how this works: Labor and the Liberals get into office and then they expect to continue this cosy little club with just the two of them setting the rules for everyone else. They want that to continue because that serves the Labor and Liberal political establishment. But it does not serve the Victorian public, because heaven forbid anyone actually forces Labor and Liberal MPs to abide by the standards of behaviour that the public actually expects.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (78): Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

Noes (4): Gabrielle de Vietri, Will Fowles, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

David HODGETT (Croydon) (10:25): Thanks to the Greens. I thought I would have to call a quorum on myself to get more people into the chamber to listen to the contribution, but now that we have had a division more people are in here. I have got a captive audience.

It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. We have been eagerly awaiting this bill to come onto the government business program so we could get stuck into the second-

reading debate. Just to refresh people's memories, it was introduced into the house on 1 April, second-read on 2 April and I think I wrote the bill report for the shadow cabinet's consideration back on 17 April, so it has been a few months. I had to dust off the notes and refresh my memory on the bill. Anyway, it is good to have it here because we on this side of the house are not opposing the bill. I will go through and talk a bit about our reasons for arriving at that position and make a number of points. I know my colleagues are keen to make contributions on this bill, so I will get through mine as quickly as possible and allow time for other speakers. Just again to refresh the memory, if we go back to the purpose of the bill, it is:

A Bill for an Act to amend the **Wage Theft Act 2020** to repeal the wage theft offences, rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, confer new functions and change the title of the Act, to consequently amend other Acts and for other purposes.

The main purposes of the bill as outlined in the bill are:

The purposes of this Act are –

- (a) to amend the **Wage Theft Act 2020** –
 - (i) to repeal the wage theft offences and related provisions; and
 - (ii) to rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria; and
 - (iii) to confer new functions on the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria; and
 - (iv) to change the title of the Act; and
 - (v) to provide for any necessary transitional provisions; and
- (b) to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

There are two main parts to the bill that I will come to, but to give some background and provide some context to this bill and our position I want to talk a little bit about the background of, firstly, the wage theft component of the bill and then, secondly, the Wilson review part of this bill.

In terms of background on wage theft, people may recall that the Victorian government's Wage Theft Act 2020 was introduced in the Parliament on 18 March 2020 and commenced operation on 1 July 2021. This act criminalises the deliberate and dishonest withholding of employee entitlements. Additionally, the Wage Inspectorate Victoria was established to enforce those laws. Then the Albanese government introduced the Fair Work Legislation (Closing Loopholes) Act 2023, which passed in December 2023. Amendments to the Fair Work Act 2009 Commonwealth through the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Act 2024 Commonwealth made it a criminal offence in Australia to intentionally underpay wages. The Commonwealth legislation, in practical terms, overtakes the Victorian wage theft scheme, and therefore the Victorian Labor government flagged some time ago that they intended to repeal the Victorian offences to avoid uncertainty for the community and businesses. And whilst it has taken quite some time to do that, the government did flag they were going to do that. It was no longer necessary. The Commonwealth changes overtook the Victorian wage theft scheme, hence the purpose of this bill.

In terms of the Wilson review, again by way of background, a series of media reports from July 2024 focused on allegations of criminal activity involving the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union, better known as the CFMEU, including intimidation and coercion and anti-competitive behaviour on Victorian government construction project worksites. There was quite a great deal of commentary in the paper about this behaviour on Victorian government construction project sites, or alleged behaviour if you like. Then on 15 July 2024 the Premier announced that the Victorian government would establish an independent review to consider recommendations to strengthen the power of the Victorian government bodies who are engaged with or have oversight of construction companies and construction unions and to respond to allegations of criminal or other unlawful conduct in the Victorian construction sector. I think that announcement was welcomed and long overdue. We are keen to see movement in that area, particularly following those damning reports.

Then on 20 July 2024 the Premier established the review into Victorian government bodies' engagement with construction companies and construction unions, otherwise known as the Wilson review. The Victorian Liberals and Nationals at the time – or still are – were critical of that Wilson review. We labelled it a farce and not a genuine effort to bring about effective reform that will crack down on the CFMEU, crack down on their misconduct and rein in the massive billion-dollar cost blowouts that all Victorians are paying the price for. The Victorian Liberal–Nationals proposed a royal commission to get to the bottom of the alleged rorts and criminal conduct that has flourished across Big Build sites under the Allan Labor government. We also announced that a future Liberal–Nationals government will restore integrity to major projects by establishing a new independent watchdog, construction enforcement Victoria, and that is an important point which I will come back to shortly.

Turning quickly to the main provisions of the bill, the bill will amend the Wage Theft Act 2020 to repeal Victoria's wage theft offences and associated compliance and enforcement functions and powers, as well as rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to better reflect its role and functions going forward. The bill will give effect to the Victorian government's decision to repeal Victoria's wage theft offences following commencement of the Commonwealth offences in the Fair Work Act 2009, otherwise known as the Fair Work Act, on 1 January 2025. The Commonwealth offences were drafted to cover the field of criminalising the underpayment of wages and other entitlements. The Commonwealth government introduced amendments to the Fair Work Act 2009, as I have stated, in the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Act 2024, which makes it a criminal offence in Australia to intentionally underpay wages. The Commonwealth wage theft laws commenced on 1 January 2025, and as a result the Victorian wage theft laws are largely inoperable and can be repealed.

The bill will implement recommendation 1 of the Wilson review to establish a complaints referral function within the independent statutory body, Workplace Inspectorate Victoria, to receive and refer complaints relating to public construction. This will establish a central agency to receive and refer complaints relating to Victorian government construction sites to the bodies who can assist.

If I can refer to the second-reading speech by the minister, the second-reading speech states:

In setting up the complaints referral function, the Bill also supports the implementation of Recommendation 7, by empowering the Workforce Inspectorate to receive reports from any person, which includes principal contractors. Where these matters are of a criminal nature, they will need to be handled in accordance with criminal procedure laws.

The Bill includes a definition of 'public construction' ...

...

The Bill allows the Workforce Inspectorate to be re-named to better reflect its revised legislative mandate, as well as re-naming the principal Act. The Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be known as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and the *Wage Theft Act 2020* will be re-named the *Workforce Inspectorate Act 2025*.

...

The Bill also makes consequential amendments to the *Child Employment Act 2003*, *Long Service Leave Act 2018* and *Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005* to reflect the new Act name and references to the Workforce Inspectorate.

They are pretty straightforward and sensible changes to do that. It goes on to say:

The legislative reforms also interact with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* to support the referral of complaints and ensure appropriate privacy protections are in place for the referring entity. They also interact with the recently amended *Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012* and regulations, which prohibit members of prescribed organisations from entering certain areas of Victorian Government worksites.

The bill briefing is always a valuable part of the process of scrutinising legislation, and we very much appreciated the bill briefing. I will come back to thanking those members from the minister's office and from the department who assisted and answered a number of our questions. The way we go through a process of looking at bills is that obviously the bill goes out to my colleagues, the Liberal–

Nationals, and we seek their input and comments, and there is a wide variety of expertise and experience amongst some of our people that look at these bills and have practical work experience. We also write to stakeholders of course and ask for any areas of concern to be raised so that we can put those in the bill briefing or have some discussion of them in terms of coming to our position of not opposing the bill.

If I can go through a couple of areas of concern, just to put them on record here in my contribution, the complaints referral function does not require the workforce inspectorate to investigate or resolve complaints directly but rather to act as a clearing house, ensuring that complaints are received and referred to the appropriate agency. The workforce inspectorate will be a central point of communication; it will not have powers to require referral matters to be followed up. In relation to the first part of that area, where I mentioned the complaints referral function does not require the workforce inspectorate to investigate or resolve complaints directly but rather to act as a clearing house, ensuring that complaints are received and referred to the appropriate agency, we indeed will watch how this actually works in practice. It is important. We place a high degree of importance on that, but we want to see how that will work in practice.

The next point I made was that the workforce inspectorate will be a central point of communication. It will not have the powers to require referred matters to be followed up, as this would interfere with the powers of other independent law enforcement agencies. We understand that argument, but currently it is not working. We constantly, I think on both sides of this house, hear story after story and example after example of people with experiences in the construction industry or dealing with some of the people and the alleged behaviour there. I know and respect the view that if there is unlawful activity or alleged unlawful activity, you refer it to the appropriate authorities, but if the current structure is not working, I would have thought it would be better that the workforce inspectorate would have the powers to actually have those matters followed up, so they do not just refer them to the relevant agency, they actually play an active role in monitoring and ensuring that they pay up, because that is the important part. A lot of these things get reported or alleged, but then nothing really happens and those behaviours continue. In fact I have heard comments of union officials bragging, 'Oh, look, don't worry, this will wash over. It'll be back to business as usual next week or next month.' I think it plays a very important part in keeping the pressure on and stamping out this behaviour and showing that you are fair dinkum about stamping out this behaviour. It has got to be followed up, not just referred. We would have liked to have seen that, but given the legislation and given the components of this bill, we will have a look at how that works in practice and certainly look to improve or come back to that should we need to.

Just to continue on where I left off, as I said, the workforce inspectorate will be a central point of communication. It will not have powers to require referred matters to be followed up, as this would interfere with the powers of other independent law enforcement agencies. Nor is it given powers to take action itself in relation to a referred matter. That is back to my point: I think our view would be that they probably need to play a more active role without interfering or crossing over the independent law enforcement agencies but working in cooperation with them or collaboration with them to get results here. We acknowledge that, as recognised by Mr Greg Wilson in his review report, the responsibility for action belongs to the law enforcement or regulatory agency that has the relevant powers. The workforce inspectorate will have operational capacity to monitor the status and resolution of complaints over time – but I will come back to that point when we talk about the implementation of these changes.

The Wilson review made eight recommendations about how the powers of Victorian government bodies can be strengthened to better respond to allegations of criminal and other unlawful behaviour. This bill implements recommendation 1 of the Wilson review and supports the implementation of recommendation 7. I will add that when asked at the bill briefing why the bill is only dealing with recommendations 1 and 7 and why the bill did not include all the recommendations, we were advised that work is underway and further legislation will be brought before the Parliament this year. It would

be easy for one to be critical of that – to encourage all the recommendations of the Wilson review to be brought forward and dealt with – but I respect the advice that was given at the bill briefing from the minister’s office and from the department that a second tranche of legislation will come and work will be done on that. Therefore our concern would be how long that will be. But given my initial comments that this legislation was introduced and second-read back in early April, having had a recent update from the minister’s office it is my understanding that this bill is in here now and that other piece of work has been done, and we would expect to see further legislation in the not-too-distant future. So we will reserve or strike out any criticism there, because as I said, we wanted the Wilson review recommendations to be dealt with sooner rather than later, but it looks like that is occurring just in the natural course of time. We look forward to seeing that further legislation dealing with the recommendations of the Wilson review and again going through the process of looking at that bill, looking at that legislation and the changes that it makes.

The second-reading speech states the Victorian government is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of the action taken to acquit the Wilson report’s recommendations and their impact on managing issues of criminal and unlawful conduct within Victorian government construction sites two years after the laws commence. The evaluation will also assess whether further reforms may be needed to make sure our construction industry meets the expectations of the Victorian people. I will make a couple of points there. We did raise a concern that the evaluation will be two years after the commencement of the laws. Two years is a long time, and given what has been alleged and given the stories we hear about alleged criminal activity and unlawful behaviour on Victorian government construction sites, we would perhaps have welcomed a shorter review time because we think there needs to be constant oversight. A lot can go on in two years. In terms of evaluating this legislation two years after the laws commence, we would have perhaps preferred to have seen constant or ongoing oversight and evaluation and changes made, should they be required. Two years is a long time for further things to happen. The evaluation is going to assess whether further reforms may be needed. Again, we would welcome working with the government on those further reforms, because I will go back to my point: we thought the Wilson review should go further. We thought a royal commission was the way to deal with this; that would have been our preference. So we will watch, monitor and wait but are keen to work with the government if further reforms may be needed to make sure our construction industry meets the expectations of the Victorian people.

The further point there is if you go out and talk to people, we all know what the expectations of the Victorian people are. They know what they want the government to do in terms of cleaning up the construction industry. They were all shocked and horrified by some of the stories and some of the scenes that we have seen in the media, both print media and on TV, and some of the findings of Nick McKenzie’s report into this. It was abhorrent behaviour and should not be tolerated. We know what the expectations of Victorian people are, and I think it is our responsibility to ensure that they are met. Again, as I say, two years is a long time given what has gone on in the industry. I guess constant, regular and ongoing looking at what changes this will bring and whether they are adequate and how all this works will be very keen to watch. The new complaints referral function will commence on a date to be proclaimed. No timeframe has been given as to when the new complaints referral function will commence. Obviously I make the point that the sooner, the better. We always like to see, when important legislation comes in, that timeframes and dates are put to it to give us confidence on a way forward.

I made some comments before on how we go through our scrutiny and analysis of bills when they are introduced in this place. It is a rigorous process, but we could not do it without consulting a number of stakeholders, including Liberal and National MPs and also stakeholders in the industry. We went to a wide range of stakeholders that that this bill would impact: Ai Group, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Red Union Support Hub, DP World and the Franchise Council of Australia, to mention a few. No concerns were passed back about the bill, so that is always pleasing. If a bit of legislation comes through and those groups do not raise any concerns, that probably shows confidence

in what the bill is and what it is to achieve. No areas of concern were raised or identified with the bill. That makes it a bit easier to get to the bill briefing and to go through a few things there.

I was starting to go back to my comments earlier. I did want to just put on record my and our collective thanks for those that assisted in our process of going through this bill: Rebecca Andrews from VICMIN, Samantha Towler from VICMIN, Lissa Zass from Industrial Relations Victoria and Naomi Snyder from IRV. Those four people gave of their time and answered our questions. In fact the member for Evelyn had a number of questions, having a bit of expertise in these areas, and put some questions to Rebecca and Samantha. We were most appreciative of the follow-up and information we got back, which again assists this whole process of us having a look and being able to not only satisfy our own questions and concerns about the bill but those that were raised by our colleagues. We can pass information back to them about that. I do appreciate the time from both the minister's office and from IRV to assist us, looking at those and giving time to answer those questions, so thank you very much.

In summary, just to reiterate our position on the bill, we are not opposing it. Wage theft is unacceptable. I think we all agree with that. At the time the government introduced the wage theft legislation, we had concerns about that. The then Shadow Attorney-General Edward O'Donohue thought that then was not the time to pass that bill. If you remember, it was around COVID-19 shutdowns, which were continuing to have a huge detrimental impact on the economy and business, so we questioned the timing. Given what has happened now with the Commonwealth changes, we accept that part of the bill. As I said, we are on record as saying that wage theft is unacceptable. Given the Commonwealth wage theft laws commenced on 1 January 2025, it makes sense for us to support this part of the bill repealing the wage theft offences.

In summary again, we have called for a royal commission into alleged criminal behaviour on state government Big Build sites, and we have been critical of the Wilson review. Nevertheless, we think it is important to support measures that will crack down on CFMEU misconduct and rein in the massive billion-dollar cost blowouts that all Victorians are paying the price for.

To summarise, even though we thought a royal commission would be better, the Wilson review has been undertaken. It has made eight recommendations. If we thought it could be done better furthermore, great, but I think we should support measures that do crack down on CFMEU misconduct and rein in those massive billion-dollar cost blowouts. Hence we arrived at our position to not oppose. We still think that only a royal commission, as proposed by the Victorian Liberal-Nats, will get to the bottom of the alleged rorts and criminal conduct that has flourished across Big Build sites under the Allan Labor government, but we are not opposing this legislation. We look forward to seeing how it works in practice.

I know many of my colleagues who wish to make contributions on specific elements of the bill have practical experience in wage theft and others have an infrastructure background or have had dealings on Big Build sites, and they will obviously use their time in making contributions to this bill to flesh out and highlight those parts of the bill. Other than that, I will conclude my contribution there and look forward to other members of this place making a contribution on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:51): I rise to contribute on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025, and I am pleased that those opposite are not opposed to this bill. I reiterate what the member for Croydon said, and that was that we are all against wage theft. Unfortunately there are some employers that thrive on wage theft against employees, and it is a shame that that happens. I want to start by giving a shout-out to the mighty trade unions that represent their members on these issues. My history is that I was involved in some – I will call it – underpayment of wages issues with the ambulance service some years ago, and I will go to that a bit later in my contribution.

The main function of this bill will be to repeal Victoria's wage theft offence and associated record-keeping offences in light of the Commonwealth introducing similar offences intended to cover the field, ultimately making our offences inoperative. As a result of that, the bill will also repeal the inspectorate's related investigative functions. To better reflect this revised role, the Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be henceforth known as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. This will in no way change the formal status of the inspectorate, and it will continue to be an independent statutory authority led by the commissioner.

Victoria was the first state in Australia to introduce criminal offences aimed at the deliberate and dishonest underpayment of wages. We were also the first state to introduce industrial manslaughter legislation, protecting workers and keeping their workplaces safer. It was also the only jurisdiction to establish an independent authority – the Wage Inspectorate Victoria – with strong investigative powers to enforce these laws. However, Victoria's wage theft laws were rendered largely inoperable after the Commonwealth introduced its own criminal offences.

The member for Croydon went to the history of the bills, both the state bill and also the federal bill, which was moved and carried. The federal act will comprehensively regulate the enforcement of offences of wage and other entitlement underpayments. Although some of Victoria's related record-keeping offences are not covered by the Commonwealth's provisions, the Allan Labor government has chosen to repeal all of Victoria's offences to eliminate uncertainty for workers, businesses and the broader community. By doing this, we have made it easier for all to understand and access these laws, so we have made it simpler.

Complaints will go to the inspectorate's complaints referral function. The key objective of this bill is to implement recommendation 1 of the Wilson review, as we have just been informed by the member for Croydon, into the Victorian government's engagement with construction companies and construction unions, and it does so by granting the workforce inspectorate a complaints referral function, which will enable it to receive and refer complaints from any person in relation to any public construction. This new service will be responsible for receiving complaints and tip-offs about any improper conduct of public construction projects, and it ensures those complaints are referred to the appropriate investigating entity. Those entities are already in place and do a great job. It will make it easier for those complaints to be made and provide a single doorway for people and complainants to raise their issues and for those issues to be actioned, with the particular focus on those complaints that involve a threat to safety, and in particular the safety of women in the workplace. We acknowledge that the Wilson review recommended creating a brand new body to handle and refer complaints. It might be questioned why we have not followed that to the letter, but the simple fact is it is much, much quicker and more efficient to give this function to existing regulators that already have the operational capacity, rather than building a whole new agency from the ground up. It is important that this approach aligns with the government's recent economic growth statement, which commits to halving the number of business regulators in Victoria rather than creating more regulators. Embedding the complaints referral service within an existing agency is the fastest and the most effective way to establish the new service, and it draws on the skills and experience that already exist in those regulators.

Here in Victoria the Allan Labor government recognises that wage theft is a systemic problem right across the state and right across the country, which is why we took the first steps, before any other jurisdiction, to ensure that employers who stole money or withheld money and entitlements from their workers would face the full force of the law. We on this side of the house always back our hardworking Victorians, because all workers have a right to be backed and have representation to ensure that their hard-earned money is not being withheld or short-changed by their employers.

As I said earlier, in my previous role as the secretary of the ambulance union I was involved in a number of underpayment issues and in particular a big Federal Court case for paramedics across the state where they were not paid their appropriate leave loading when they took leave. This amounted to an outcome in the Federal Court where in excess of \$8.5 million was paid to paramedics who were

underpaid that leave loading in the past. That was a big outcome in the Federal Court. I cannot say that the ambulance service deliberately withheld it. I think they just did not understand or interpreted the enterprise agreement a bit differently to how we interpreted it and how the law interpreted it. I think you have those circumstances where sometimes an employer may not totally understand, or they may interpret a provision within an enterprise agreement or within an award quite differently to how a trade union might interpret it, and there may be a legal challenge based on that, with the view that there has been an underpayment of wages. Obviously if workers have the backing of a union, they can take those matters to the Fair Work Commission or to the Federal Court if it is a big enough issue. That is exactly what we did some years ago, and paramedics were paid the money that they were entitled to in regard to that leave loading, which was a great outcome for paramedics at the time.

We have these systemic problems right across many, many different workforces. As I said, some of it is deliberate and wages are deliberately withheld or underpaid, but in most cases most employers are pretty good. Some will make mistakes, there is no question about that, as we all make mistakes. The group that is most affected with underpayments is the younger generation. I think about one in three young Australians report wage theft. There are probably a lot more that do not report it because they are too afraid to report it, because most of them are casually employed. If they raise issues within the workplace, they do not receive the call to get the next shift, unfortunately, and it is really difficult to prosecute issues of underpayment when people are too scared to come forward.

I had a youth forum in Melton only a couple of years ago, and it was around young people's entitlements and their rights within the workplace. There was one particular person there that expressed her story. After working through her issue, it appeared that she was only paid \$4 an hour. She worked at a hairdressing salon, and she put up with this and was too scared to raise it. She eventually left that salon but did not prosecute that matter to receive that payment of wages. When we worked through all of her issues and what she expressed to us, only receiving \$4 an hour seemed to be unbelievable. Unfortunately, she put up with that until she had the courage to leave that employer, but she never, ever challenged that employer. We see that a lot across a lot of industries where young people work. Most employers are pretty good, but of course you have got to keep an eye on that, and that is what the mighty trade unions do. I have only got a few seconds to go. This is an important bill of repeal, and I commend the bill to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:01): I rise to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025, a bill that is really based on spin and falsehoods. Now, if you were to believe what has been peddled in the minister's second-reading speech, you would think that we are debating this bill because of the Wilson review into the CFMEU's corrupt behaviour on the government's rotten Big Build and because the federal government has legislated wage theft laws recently. But nothing could be further from the truth. This is a classic example of how the chickens have well and truly come home to roost on the Allan Labor government's unconstitutional wage theft laws and its negligent behaviour in turning a blind eye to the CFMEU's culture of thuggery and abuse on Victorian government building sites for the past decade – under the watch of Labor.

I have to admit that in reading the minister's second-reading speech on the bill, it was somewhat amusing, because it really just goes to show how disingenuous and deceitful the Labor government has become. The minister had the gall to suggest that the Wilson review had exposed a rotten culture in the construction sector. The Wilson review did nothing of the sort. It was the *60 Minutes* program that months earlier had exposed corruption and thuggery in the CFMEU to millions of viewers. That is not to mention the fact that for the past 20 years courts all over this country have repeatedly condemned the CFMEU for its blatant offending. The CFMEU has been found to have contravened this country's workplace laws on more than 1500 –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, this bill is about wage theft, not about any other matters that the member wishes to raise.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will not uphold the point of order. The lead speaker was given some latitude to go to this, so it is open for rebuttal as well.

Bridget VALLENCE: The CFMEU has been found to have contravened the country's workplace laws on more than 1500 occasions and has been ordered to pay more than \$24 million in penalties. So bad and so corrupt has the CFMEU become that the courts have labelled it a 'recidivist offender'. To suggest that it was somehow uncovered by the Wilson review, as in the minister's second-reading speech, is utter rubbish. The government says the bill is needed to implement the first recommendation of the Wilson review to establish a complaints referral function. Seriously, after the Premier herself has described the CFMEU's conduct as demonstrating a deeply 'rotten culture', this government's response is to implement a complaints referral function. Rather than setting up an independent body that will have proper investigative and enforcement powers to penalise unlawful conduct, like the Victorian Liberals and Nationals have proposed with our construction enforcement Victoria policy, all Labor wants to do is refer the complaints somewhere else. This pathetic response will do nothing to clean up the culture of corruption in the construction industry.

We have known on this side for years that the CFMEU has engaged in thuggish and abusive behaviour on Labor's Big Build projects, and only last year the Federal Court imposed a \$168,000 penalty on the CFMEU and an official for disrupting works on the West Gate Tunnel Project, which is now \$6 billion over budget, three years late and still not finished. During the disruption the CFMEU officials intimidated and abused WorkSafe inspectors and Victoria Police members, including accusing them of being lapdogs of building contractors and being corrupt. These Victorian public servants were being abused by the CFMEU bosses for simply doing their job, and where was their employer? Where was this Labor government? Justice Snaden condemned the CFMEU officials for their conduct in this case, and found:

By holding up the performance of work, and by refusing to engage in a meaningful way with management –
the WorkSafe inspector –

... or the police as to their concerns, the conduct in which –
the CFMEU officials –

... indulged bespoke a thuggish assertion of control over how the site should operate.

He went on to say that:

... their response was to bully their interlocutors with unwarranted insults and abuse.

This Labor government did nothing to protect the WorkSafe inspector or Victoria Police members from this abuse and did nothing to hold the CFMEU to account. Instead, the Allan Labor government turned a blind eye to the culture of corruption and bullying and continued to accept millions of dollars in political donations and affiliation fees from the CFMEU bosses. This Labor government did nothing to stop the CFMEU's rotten culture being embedded in the construction industry. Instead, Labor enabled it.

Gary Maas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have been listening intently and, on relevance, I have not once heard the member speak to the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will not uphold the point of order. However, I will ask the member to proceed on the bill.

Bridget VALLENCE: I now turn to the part of the bill to repeal Victoria's wage theft laws. It certainly makes for interesting reading when you think of the tortured history of these laws. The government first announced it was repealing these laws back in December 2023, yet it has taken a year and a half to finally do it. Let me make it absolutely clear, it is totally unacceptable for employers to underpay their employees. Employers who do the wrong thing should absolutely face the consequences. Not only is it unlawful to deny employees their minimum entitlements, but it results in

an unlevel playing field for employers. Employers who underpay their staff gain an unfair advantage. It denies employees their income, and not only that, it denies their employees their rightful amount of superannuation. On any measure, denying employees their minimum entitlements is unacceptable, and I have assisted many of my local constituents with underpayment claims, including schoolteachers who have been underpaid and TAFE teachers who have been forced to work unpaid overtime.

However, the attempt by the state Labor government to introduce wage theft laws, which are now being repealed, has been a disaster, because back in March 2020 the then Attorney-General announced with fanfare that employers who underpaid their workers would face up to 10 years jail and would face the full force of the law. We know that through the COVID lockdowns they said that they were going to pass these wage theft laws and introduce criminal penalties. The former industrial relations minister referred to these as ‘nation leading’. But after all this fanfare – in November 2022 the first wage theft charges had been laid in Victoria – and the same story, the wage inspectorate commissioner announced in a media release that he had laid 47 charges against Rehmat and Mehar Proprietary Limited, which operated a restaurant known as the Macedon Lounge, and it was alleged that the company had underpaid employees a total of \$7000. A director was also charged. In his media release the wage inspectorate commissioner said:

Victorians can be confident the Wage Inspectorate is doggedly investigating wage theft reports and intends to bring further appropriate matters before the court.

However, the employer responded by not only paying the outstanding wages back to employees but commencing proceedings in the High Court, arguing these nation-leading so-called wage theft laws were unconstitutional. Given this is the first case of its kind, you would think that the state Labor government would fight tooth and nail to defend its position after all that rhetoric. Well, you would be wrong, because the Labor government buckled and caved because it knew it had no constitutional leg to stand on.

It is a theme of this Labor government to introduce laws that are then found to be unconstitutional. In a backflip, the Labor government dropped all 94 charges against the employer and withdrew its very first and only wage theft case, demonstrating it was a failure and an embarrassment. After years of rhetoric about these supposedly nation-leading wage theft laws, they could not argue that they were constitutional. So what happened to the commissioner doggedly pursuing the cases of wage theft? What happened to employers facing the full force of the law? These laws are being repealed because there was an abject failure. Only one prosecution was commenced, and then it was withdrawn. Labor has not found one employer guilty of wage theft, zero penalties have been imposed and no-one has been sent to jail. The minister’s office told us in the bill briefing that 600 wage theft complaints were made, but what happened to them? We know through the bill briefing that actually the department refused to answer how many investigations have actually commenced. We will not be opposing this bill. The bill repeals wage theft laws that were completely unconstitutional and should be consigned to the dustbin of history.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (11:11): I rise today to speak in favour of the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025, and I thank the Minister for Industrial Relations for introducing this bill to the house. This bill is a significant step forward in ensuring that complaints about unlawful or intimidatory conduct on Victorian government construction sites are handled efficiently and effectively. The bill will simplify the process of complaints to agencies, providing further access to all, including marginalised communities. It will protect the rights of all workers in ensuring that wage theft has no place in the Victorian construction industry. It will also in effect repeal Victoria’s wage theft laws in light of the commencement of the Commonwealth’s national law.

At this moment there are multiple state and federal entities with powers to respond to different issues that might arise on any worksites across our state. While this shows clearly that the federal government and the Allan Labor government are committed to protecting workers rights, this is inefficient and can make navigating this area more difficult for workers. One of the most commendable aspects of this

bill is the establishment of a centralised complaints referral function. This central agency will serve as a single point of contact for individuals coming forward with critical information about unlawful or intimidatory conduct on worksites. By providing a one-doorway approach we will simplify the process for complainants, making it easier for them to report their concerns without the confusion of navigating multiple agencies. Millions of Victorians across our state can be assured that this centralisation will not only streamline the complaints process but also ensure that complaints are assessed and referred to the appropriate regulatory bodies promptly.

This bill in front of us today will rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and the Wage Theft Act 2020 to the Workforce Inspectorate Act 2025. More than anything else, these changes reflect the expanded mandate of the inspectorate. Furthermore, they ensure that the name accurately represents its broader role without altering its formal status as an independent statutory authority. This bill also grants the workforce inspectorate the necessary legislative functions to manage the complaints referral process. This includes receiving information about suspected criminal or unlawful conduct and sharing it with the appropriate bodies. The ability to facilitate a two-way flow of information is crucial, as it allows the workforce inspectorate to follow up on complaints and matters it has referred to other agencies. This will ensure that complainants are kept informed of any responses or updates, fostering transparency and accountability. For the people in my electorate of Mulgrave this will mean a more reliable and efficient system for addressing their concerns about workplace conduct. Residents can trust that their complaints will be handled promptly and referred to the right authorities, ensuring swift action and resolution.

The Allan Labor government is committed to supporting, either in full or in principle, all recommendations of the Wilson review. This bill mandates that contracts for state projects include new requirements for principal contractors to report and manage criminal or unlawful conduct on Victorian government-funded worksites. Principal contractors are required to report any suspected criminal or unlawful conduct to the new complaints referral body. Failure to meet these reporting obligations could constitute a breach of contract, providing clearer grounds for enforcement if issues arise. I know that there are a lot of tradies, construction workers and contractors across our state who routinely do the right thing and hold themselves to the highest possible standards. Rest assured, this legislation will not make their work any more difficult. Instead, it aims to support and protect those who are committed to doing the right thing.

This bill also emphasises the importance of women's safety in the construction sector. As many of us would know, construction is still a very male-dominated industry, with over four out of five payroll jobs currently held by men. The Allan Labor government is fully committed to driving long-term structural and cultural change across this industry. By implementing the *Building Equitable Futures Strategy 2024–32* and the *Building Equality Policy 2023*, we aim to increase women's workforce participation, break down barriers and challenge existing attitudes and norms. The complaints referral function will have a special focus on women's safety, ensuring that their concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. I might add that we on this side like to support women. We women also like to support our fellow women.

On top of all these amendments, this government is also committed to evaluating the effectiveness of these measures two years after implementation. This evaluation will assess the impact of the bill on managing issues of criminal and unlawful conduct within Victorian government construction sites. It will also consider whether further reforms are needed to ensure that our construction industry meets the expectations of the Victorian people.

The provisions repealing wage theft laws will commence quickly, aligning with Commonwealth offences, while the new complaints referral function will start on a date to be proclaimed. This phased approach allows for the proper implementation of the new functions, including the recruitment and training of staff and the set-up of necessary ICT systems.

My district of Mulgrave is an incredibly diverse area, with people from all corners of the globe. They are united in one common thing: the belief that here in Australia they will be able to work hard, earn a good wage and support their families. It is where they come in search of a better and safer life. Unfortunately, at this time, wage theft disproportionately affects workers with migrant backgrounds. By implementing a simplification of the complaints process, the Allan Labor government is supporting these marginalised communities around Victoria, including in the electorate of Mulgrave.

With dozens of schools, the Mulgrave area is being seen as an opportunity for families to begin their journey. This will lead to the creation of new homes and further amenities. By committing to the protection of workers rights, families in expanding areas such as Mulgrave can know that their new community has been built through fair and supported work. Our household income is slightly lower than the state average, so every dollar lost to wage theft can have a significant impact.

This bill in front of us today is a commitment from the Allan government and from the Labor Party that we are the party for all workers and we want a fair go for everyone. This is the reason why I joined the Labor Party: to give a fair go to everyone, to be that voice for a fair go. We are determined to make continuous improvement to ensure that we remain responsive to emerging trends and challenges, making necessary adjustments to our laws and policies as required.

I know that many in my community of Mulgrave will benefit from these laws. They will be able to ensure that they get a good wage, that they get to support their families, that they get to put a roof over their head and pay their bills and that they get to do the thing that they aspire to, like every one of us, and we are protecting them.

To finish up, the bill in front of us today represents a significant advancement in our efforts to protect individuals on Victorian government construction sites from unlawful and intimidatory conduct. By establishing a centralised complaints referral function we simplify the process for complainants, ensure accountability and transparency and provide more efficient and effective systems for handling complaints. The focus on women's safety and the protection of workers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities like mine, the new contractor reporting requirements and the commitment to continuous evaluation and improvement will further strengthen the bill's impact. I commend the bill to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (11:20): I rise today to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. While the opposition will not oppose this legislation, I must highlight the serious concerns this bill raises about this government's relationship with the CFMEU and the inadequate response to construction industry corruption that continues to cost Victorian taxpayers billions. This bill perfectly demonstrates Labor's priorities: protect their union mates and punish small business. The opposition supports repealing Victoria's wage theft offences given the Commonwealth's Fair Work legislation now covers this field nationally. It makes sense to avoid jurisdictional duplication when federal laws commenced on 1 January 2025, effectively making Victoria's provisions inoperable. We also support measures that could genuinely crack down on the CFMEU's misconduct and address the massive cost blowouts plaguing Victoria and its construction projects. However, this bill falls far short of what is needed to address the systematic problems exposed by the Wilson review.

Let us be clear about what we are dealing with. The Wilson review exposed criminal activity involving the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union, including intimidation and coercion and anti-competitive behaviour on Victorian government construction project worksites. These are not minor workplace disputes. These are serious criminal allegations that have cost taxpayers billions in project overruns. Yet what is this government's response? A complaints referral service that acts as a clearing house with no power – basically a toothless tiger with no power to take action and no power to require follow-ups on referrals. This is bureaucratic window-dressing designed to create the appearance of action whilst avoiding real accountability for the union that bankrolls Labor's campaigns. The relationship between this Labor government and the CFMEU tells us everything we

need to know about why this response is inadequate. The CFMEU has donated millions to state and federal campaigns for the Labor Party.

Gabrielle Williams: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know these debates are often wideranging, but this one seems to have now gone on for a number of minutes on some quite tangential matters. I would respectfully ask that the speaker from the opposition could be brought back to the bill at hand.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member was debating matters that are in the lead speaker's debate and also the second-reading speech, so there is no point of order.

Rachel WESTAWAY: The relationship between this Labor government and the CFMEU tells us everything we need to know about why this response is inadequate. The CFMEU has donated millions to state and federal campaigns. Multiple Labor MPs have appeared at the CFMEU events and relied on union support for their electoral success.

I am not opposed to the fundamental principles of unionism. My father was a union member and a person with English as his second language facing employment difficulties. They were enormously supportive. However, the power and corrupt behaviour of the CFMEU is unconscionable, and Victorians absolutely deserve better. When faced with the undeniable evidence of criminal conduct by their union mates, what does this government do? It creates a toothless tiger referral service while small businesses face potential criminal prosecution for honest award interpretation mistakes. They are protecting their political benefactors while punishing innocent employers. The CFMEU's criminal conduct is not just about workplace relations but about the billions of taxpayer dollars wasted on inflated construction projects, and we just need to look at the evidence: the West Gate Tunnel, almost double, to \$12 billion, and years behind schedule; the Metro Tunnel, \$5 billion in cost blowouts and time extensions; and level crossing removal programs consistently over budget and behind schedule. Every time the CFMEU threatens industrial action, demands excessive manning or engages in the intimidation tactics the Wilson review documented, taxpayers pay through inflated costs and delayed infrastructure. Yet this bill does nothing to address these fundamental problems.

The opposition called for a royal commission to get to the bottom of the alleged criminal conduct flourishing across Big Build sites under this Labor government – we were right. The Wilson review, which Labor claimed would address these issues, has absolutely proved inadequate. Even this government admits it only implemented two of eight recommendations, with the rest promised for future legislation. A royal commission would have proper investigative powers, the ability to compel evidence and the independence necessary to expose the full extent of CFMEU corruption and Labor's role in enabling it. Instead we get a complaints referral service that cannot even investigate the complaints it receives.

While this government protects its union mates, small businesses in my electorate face the collateral damage. Prahran hosts over 3000 small businesses, predominantly cafes, restaurants and retail outlets, employing thousands of Victorians. These businesses have never received government construction contracts, never dealt with the CFMEU and never engaged in industrial sabotage. Yet they operate under the threat of criminal prosecution for wage theft under Commonwealth laws, while facing new bureaucratic processes under the Victorian system. A small cafe owner in South Yarra struggling with 100 pages of the restaurant industry award could face criminal referral for miscalculating penalty rates, whilst the CFMEU official who the Wilson review found engaged in systematic criminal conduct faces no meaningful consequences.

This bill renames the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and gives it responsibility for child employment, long service leave, owner-drivers, forestry contractors and now construction complaints. This is exactly the kind of regulatory mission that creates confusion and inefficiency. When one agency tries to be everything to everyone, from child actors to construction corruption, it regulates nothing effectively. The government talks about creating one doorway for

complaints, but small businesses already face multiple regulators – the Fair Work ombudsman, WorkSafe Victoria, local councils and numerous others, adding another layer that does not solve coordination problems but creates more confusion.

If this government was serious about addressing construction industry corruption, it would implement the comprehensive reforms that the opposition has proposed. We announced that a future Liberal–National government will establish construction enforcement Victoria, an independent watchdog with real powers to investigate misconduct and ensure project accountability. Instead of this the complaints referral service cannot even investigate or take action. We need an independent body with the authority to investigate criminal allegations on government construction sites, impose financial penalties for project delays caused by unlawful conduct and exclude companies and unions from government contracts when criminal conduct is established.

We also need to provide transparent reporting on construction costs and delays. The government admits Commonwealth laws now criminalise wage theft across Australia. If federal frameworks are adequate for wage theft, why aren't they adequate for addressing the CFMEU's industrial sabotage and intimidation? The answer is simple: this government do not want real accountability for the union that funds their campaigns. Federal authorities have jurisdiction over industrial disputes and criminal conduct on construction sites. What is missing is not another referral pathway, it is political will to use existing powers against the CFMEU. Genuine worker protection requires holding corrupt unions accountable, not protecting them from consequences. When the CFMEU engages in intimidation and coercion, ordinary construction workers suffer. When their criminal conduct inflates project costs, taxpayers fund their misconduct. When they create workplace cultures of fear and violence, everyone loses – except the union officials.

This bill protects union power while creating bureaucracy that will primarily affect small businesses having nothing to do with the construction industry problems. The government promises to evaluate this legislation's effectiveness in two years time. Given what we have seen in the construction industry, two years is far too long. Every month this government fails in its work to deliver things on time and on budget. We need to address the CFMEU accountability. At the moment taxpayers will lose millions through inflated project costs and delays. The opposition's proposal for construction enforcement Victoria represents the kind of independent oversight we need. Unlike the government's toothless referral service, construction enforcement Victoria would have real investigative powers, the ability to exclude bad actors from government contracts and the independence necessary to hold both companies and unions accountable.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (11:30): It is a pleasure to rise and talk on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. Here in Victoria we are proud to lead this nation on many reforms, but particularly in strengthening protections for workers and ensuring that fair balance between the rights of employees and the responsibilities of employers. For decades Labor governments, both federal and state, have driven reforms that send a really strong message that we are a government that values, respects and protects working people. From pioneering workplace safety laws, making superannuation compulsory, introducing family violence leave, establishing portable long service leave, holding labour hire firms to account, equal opportunity laws – and more recently I was involved in a committee looking at the gaps that we have in existing laws around workplace surveillance and employee privacy – to the working-from-home legislation that we recently announced, we have consistently stood up for fairness, dignity and security in our workplaces.

I really look forward to hearing the government's response to that inquiry into workplace surveillance. Throughout the inquiry we heard that privacy and surveillance laws have not kept pace with the technology that employers are now using, and we made some recommendations about how to make some reforms in that space, particularly for the introduction of workplace surveillance legislation that would on its own clearly state what is reasonable, necessary and proportionate when employers are watching or surveilling employees in their workplace or while they are undertaking work. It was unfortunate that we did not all agree in that committee, and we saw the other side write a minority

report on behalf of employers. ‘Nothing to see here’ was kind of their argument, and I question if they really stand up for workers and working people.

Those reforms that I have listed, both at a federal level and a state level, which we have led, are not just pieces of paper and policies that we can all go and Google. They are actually protections that change and affect real working people. They have kept workers safe, they have ensured that they are being paid what they are owed and they recognise that a fair day’s work deserves a fair day’s pay. For context, in particular for this bill, four years ago, in July 2021, we made history here in Victoria. It was at that moment that we clearly stated and very loudly said that if you steal from your workers, you are committing a crime. It was not about catching those who had made a bookkeeping error, it was not about catching those who had made a misunderstanding, but for those committing the deliberate act of withholding or stealing wages, it was then a crime. Under the Wage Theft Act 2020, an employer who deliberately underpays wages or withholds super or cheats employees out of their entitlements faces the full force of the law – fines of up to \$1 million for companies and individuals and 10 years behind bars. As I have indicated, that was not about punishing honest mistakes. It was about protecting people from deliberate exploitation and from those who knew exactly what they were doing – they thought they could get away with it, and they were targeting the most vulnerable workers, those who might have been too afraid to speak up or those who believed that no-one would listen to them.

In 2021 we also created the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, a watchdog given powers to investigate, prosecute and enforce not only these new wage theft laws but also the protection of young workers’ long service leave and fair contracting in key industries. Here in 2025, four years on, we can say that we not just talked about it but we actually put it into law and backed it up with that action. As indicated, we knew wage theft was not an accident, it was a systematic problem across our economy.

As has been identified today, now that the federal government has stepped into this space every state and territory has outlawed wage theft following the passage of the federal government’s Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Bill 2023. That is a major win for working people across our nation, and that has been led from this state here in Victoria.

The key reforms that will happen under this bill are the repeal of wage theft offences and then the renaming of the inspectorate. The bill repeals the wage theft offences and associated record-keeping offences in light of the Commonwealth introducing similar offences intended to cover the field, and as a consequence, the bill repeals the inspectorate-related investigation powers and functions. It renames the principal act and the inspectorate to better reflect a new, revised role. The Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be known as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and the Wage Theft Act will be renamed the Workforce Inspectorate Act 2025.

I just want to be clear, though, that even though I have outlined all that, this is not the end of our fight for fairness for our workers, and that inspectorate will continue to do vital work in the field. In contrast, I suppose, to what I am hearing from the other side, this inspectorate has over its time helped workers reclaim more than \$1 million of unpaid long service leave entitlements, which is money back in the pockets of working families. It has benefited over 1400 workers and also provided education to businesses and further workers across this state. It was a simple message that we would stand up for working people, and we will continue that in this place. We will never stop fighting to make sure that workers get what they deserve and what they are owed in full, on time and every time.

As indicated, we have undertaken the Wilson review and that review did come with some recommendations. One of those recommendations is part of this bill today. Starting with recommendation 1, that a complaints referral body be set up to receive and refer complaints relating to Victorian government construction sites, this will be established within the workforce inspectorate. We know, and the Premier has clearly stated, that criminal and unlawful behaviour has no place anywhere and particularly in Victoria’s construction industry. We owe it to every honest worker and every law-abiding business to clean up that industry, and we are doing that.

But it is important to remember that the actions of a few do not define the many. There are many unions across this country that embody the very best of our values: they fight for fair pay; they fight for a safe workplace, job security and dignity at work; and they hold employers accountable when workers are underpaid, mistreated or put at risk. They give a voice to people who may be silenced. A good union does not just look after its members; it lifts the standards for the entire workforce. It negotiates in good faith, it acts with integrity and it understands a strong workplace is built on respect between workers and their representatives and employers. The truth is that many of the rights that we take for granted now – the weekend, sick leave and super – would not have been won without our good unions and our representatives. While we will take strong action to deal with corruption, intimidation and unlawful conduct when they do occur, we will also support the rights of workers to organise, to be represented and to be treated with respect.

This bill is a really important bill. This is now across our country. We have led from this state. This will create a single entry point with the powers to receive and refer complaints, a clear one-door entry point for workers to raise issues, and it will assess each matter directly with the most appropriate regulator. Our record has been clear. I have outlined that today. We do not just talk about looking after workers, we deliver on reforms and make them real. We led the nation on this issue of wage theft. We knew wage theft was not an accident but a deliberate act that was breaking the law, and we made it a crime. The Commonwealth are now leading in this space, and we have protections for workers across this country, which is an excellent thing. Victoria leads on many of these issues, and we are very proud to have this bill today.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (11:40): I rise to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. In listening to the contributions from those on the other side I wonder how much they have actually read the bill and what it does. There has been wideranging talk about protecting workers rights, which we all aspire to do. They have talked about wage theft. The Commonwealth government has now moved legislation to take over that role, and as we know, Commonwealth legislation when it comes to employment overrides state legislation. So this repealing of the act and renaming of the act was necessary because of what the Commonwealth has done there. Effectively it takes the Wage Inspectorate Victoria and turns it into the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, and it responds to recommendation 1 and part of recommendation 7 out of the Wilson report, which was an inquiry into allegations of intimidation, coercion and anti-competitive behaviour on Victorian government construction worksites here in Victoria.

If you think about what the new body actually does, the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria is there to receive and refer complaints relating to public construction, and public construction is actually defined in the bill. In the second-reading speech the minister said:

In setting up the complaints referral function, the Bill also supports the implementation of Recommendation 7, by empowering the Workforce Inspectorate to receive reports from any person, which includes principal contractors. Where these matters are of a criminal nature, they will need to be handled in accordance with criminal procedure laws.

No-one has arguments with that, but the speech says:

The complaints referral function does not require the Workforce Inspectorate to investigate or resolve complaints directly –

so they will receive complaints; they are a clearing house, they will pass them on to someone else –

but rather, act as a clearing house, ensuring that complaints are received and referred to the appropriate agency. The Workforce Inspectorate will be a central point of communication.

Again, it is just handling the complaints and passing them on to someone to actually do something about them. It continues:

It will not have powers to require referred matters to be followed up ...

So, yes, they will receive complaints, but they will refer them on to someone else and will have no powers to actually make sure that anything is done with those complaints that are put forward:

... as this would interfere with the powers of other independent law enforcement agencies ...

So we have a government body that has been set up. It is going to receive complaints in public construction projects and pass them on to someone else, but it has no powers to make sure anything is done about those in the future. I question why we need this body if they are not actually going to make anything happen. To me, as I read this, the government knows they have to repeal the wage theft legislation because the Commonwealth has taken over those powers, and I think that is appropriate that they do that. But they have to be seen to be doing something with that legislation, so we have effectively got a bill that I think is about the government wanting to be seen to be doing something but not interfering with the cosy arrangement with the CFMEU on these industrial sites. We have got this body that will receive complaints, will refer them to someone else and will have no power to make sure anything is done about them other than actually have a report over time as to what happens. So why do we need it?

If I was a principal contractor, why would I go to this body with a complaint? Why wouldn't I just go direct to the police, for argument's sake, and make sure something is actually done about that? If you think about it, it has not been given any powers to take action itself in relation to matters referred, so what is it there for? The speech continues:

As recognised by Mr Greg Wilson in his review report, the responsibility for action belongs to the law enforcement or regulatory agency that has the relevant powers.

I agree 100 per cent. So I reiterate, we have got a body set up to receive information to send to someone else, but it has no power to follow up or make sure they actually do anything. It continues:

The Workforce Inspectorate will have operational capacity to monitor status and resolution of complaints over time.

So at some time in the distant future it will probably write a report. There will be a lot of people employed by this place and it will cost taxpayers a lot of money to write a report that says, 'Yes, something happened' or 'No, something didn't happen.' That is what I thought the police and the other enforcement agencies were there for. They are there to actually do something. But we have got this body to effectively do stuff-all other than pass stuff on and then maybe write a report in the future.

I commend the imagination of whoever in government has actually set this body up, that they could actually dream it up to effectively do nothing, but the government can be seen to be doing something. Those on the other side can all stand up and make their speeches about what a great job the government is doing to protect wage theft, which the Commonwealth is now managing, and looking after workers rights, which again is a thing that we all support in this place. No-one should lose pay and particularly no-one should lose entitlements. I think the fact that some companies do not pay superannuation on time and those things is something that reflects on those companies as just being plain dishonest. People's entitlements are entitlements and they should be paid, but this body is not going to do anything about that. It might write a report to give to someone else to do something about it, but it is actually not going to do anything about that over this particular time.

A number on our side have said that, if you think about this Labor government over the last 11 years, something like \$50 billion of taxpayers money has now gone west in cost overruns on major government projects, particularly here in Melbourne. What is the cause of that? The cause of that is a number of things. One is most likely the way the government has actually set the contracts up. If costs overrun, it does not seem to matter. As the former Premier said, 'Things cost what they cost.' But I would imagine that if BHP or Rio Tinto or one of the major companies here in Australia had some major capital projects and they blew out by more than double or triple, heads would roll. CEOs or senior managers in those companies would be sacked because they have not actually had good contracts and they have not had good oversight over those projects.

In Victoria no-one has been made accountable for those cost overruns – as the former Premier said, ‘It costs what it costs. We’ll just borrow some more money to actually do these projects.’ There has not necessarily been good contract design. There has not been good oversight of the contractors doing that particular project, in my opinion. And there is a cosy arrangement between the head contractors and the CFMEU in Victoria, because it costs what it costs. If we pay higher than the industry average employment, we have better conditions than the industry average: ‘It doesn’t matter, Victorian taxpayers will pick up the bill.’ The government is not worried about this, because it costs what it costs; they are happy to just pass this through the system, and Victorian taxpayers pay the cost of this. As I have said in this place a number of times: \$50 billion is a lot of noughts. Most people cannot comprehend what \$50 billion would buy here in Victoria. I have talked about this before and I will say it again: we all know that the condition of the roads in Victoria is absolutely atrocious. There are 23,000 kilometres of highways and freeways here in Victoria controlled by VicRoads. If you put \$1 million a kilometre into fixing those roads – and that would fix a hell of a lot of roads – that is only \$23 billion. So less than half of the cost overruns would effectively fix every kilometre of VicRoads roads here in Victoria – but no, it has actually gone in cost overruns.

No-one sees anything better for a cost overrun. If a project was going to cost \$10 billion, that is what it should cost. If it costs \$20 billion and you still get the same project, no-one has got any extra benefit for that extra \$10 billion – that could have done 10,000 kilometres of highway here in Victoria. That is how you put into context what these cost overruns actually mean to Victorians. It equally applies to upgrades to our schools or our hospitals. We have seen the failure from the government on the waiting list for surgery – a huge promise made, now a failure, because they have not met their targets. Some of that cost overrun put into the health system and partnered with the private health sector would have substantially reduced those waiting lists for emergency surgery. It is time the government was actually called out. While you have got this cosy little arrangement where it costs what it costs and it does not matter, it is actually Victorian taxpayers who are paying the price, as I have said, with the atrocious roads we have in Victoria. I heard the member for Malvern making his take-note contribution last night, including how once the condition of roads was a country issue while now it is a whole-of-Victoria issue because it equally applies in Melbourne and in the country. That is the cost we have got; this legislation does not solve any of those issues.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (11:50): I believe that I am standing up to make a contribution on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025, although listening to the previous contribution, you would hardly know it. The member for Murray Plains – and I wrote down his electorate this time – is a good guy. But, I tell you what, he is predictable. He sort of started the first 60 seconds somewhere in and around the piece of legislation that we are talking about. Then he just sledged the CFMEU for 5 minutes. Of course then we ended up on roads, and then somehow we ended up on birthing suites and elective surgery in hospitals. I mean, I would have taken a point of order, but I have said it before, it is better just to let them go and let them ramble on about nonsense for the 10 minutes that they are allotted. The member for Murray Plains started well in pointing out that there have been some changes to federal legislation that mean that wage theft is now handled through that federal legislation. I think he may have even said ‘As it should be’, but then he moved on and got upset that we no longer have any framework in Victoria to deal with wage theft or we are repealing the framework in Victoria to deal with wage theft. He went on to say for some reason that he does not think there should be a body in Victoria. Then he went on to complain that there is a body to deal with issues on government projects – government construction sites. They are Victorian government construction sites; of course there should still be a body that can handle complaints and then refer them to the appropriate authorities to make the charges.

There have been significant changes in federal legislation. This Albanese Labor government has been incredibly good for Australian workers. I do not think that there is a member of Parliament or an Australian worker that could not say that. There have obviously been changes with wage theft legislation, but also the superannuation component that you were talking about, member for Murray Plains, has now been legislated into the national employment standards. Once upon a time, as a union

organiser, unpaid superannuation was a big issue. It was a big issue, and it was an issue that was often silent or rarely noticed by workers, because a lot of workers just do not regularly check their superannuation statements. And it was incredibly hard for workers and for union officials alike – and the member for Narre Warren South, I am sure, has experienced this – to chase that up, because it was not covered under the NES. There was no right for a union official to be able to chase that; it had to be done through the ATO. And obviously you could not take those issues to the Fair Work Commission, which you now can. So this piece of legislation is in response to a whole suite of changes that have been made federally. But of course it is still appropriate to have a state body that can be referred issues on these government projects so then they can go to the appropriate authorities, whatever they may be.

The Victorian Labor government introduced wage theft legislation some time ago, and it was the first jurisdiction in Australia to do so. I remember sitting at the Labor state conference when then Premier Daniel Andrews made the announcement that Victoria would legislate wage theft to be a crime. This was after a pretty large campaign by what was then known as United Voice, which is obviously now the United Workers Union, in response to some egregious situations that had happened, particularly in the hospitality industry, but across some other industries as well. There were instances, a couple of which I will go through, where employers were systematically and on purpose stealing wages from their workers, underpaying them – just literally paying them under award. I think this was happening in some parts of the agricultural industry as well, member for Murray Plains, just paying under award rates, not paying overtime, having people work 50, 60 hours a week on an award rate and not paying overtime, not paying superannuation – obviously a big one that continues to be an issue today.

As a government we said ‘Enough is enough’ – you should be able to go to work as a Victorian and be assured that you are going to get paid what you are owed under either a modern award system or an enterprise agreement. If you are the employer that is systematically taking that right away, then there should be capacity for you to be charged. We saw the Macedon Lounge in 2022 where \$7000 in wages, penalty rates and superannuation were not paid to employees. We saw the Din Tai Fung restaurants a couple of years after that. And we had the Made Establishment by our mate George Calombaris, who ultimately admitted to having stolen \$7.8 million in wages across his enterprises over a prolonged period of time. That case was settled in a civil matter. After seeing what we saw for so long, we knew that it was time to do something.

We now have the Albanese Labor government, who have been, frankly, absolutely fantastic in the industrial relations space, picking this up and making it a federal framework. We have seen this example a fair bit, where fantastic legislation begins in Victoria under this government and then it ends up as federal policy. What we have got now, because of what we did as a Victorian government those five or six years ago, is every single worker in every single state is protected by wage theft laws. If you are an unscrupulous employer that is going to systematically, on purpose, steal wages from your employees, then there is the capacity for you to be charged, as there should be, because it is not right to steal workers’ wages, it is not right to steal their superannuation and to be able to get away with it and for there to be complex legal loopholes for you to work your way through to get away with it.

This Allan Labor government – this Labor government since 2014 – has been on the side of Victorian workers. This is one example of it – wage theft legislation which now has a federal framework. Industrial manslaughter is another example of it. I have never been unlucky enough to have a member of mine die on the job, but I know many union officials that have, and I have met families that have gone through this, which is why we have our industrial manslaughter laws – once again we were the first jurisdiction in Australia to do so. We are so incredibly important.

Obviously this year, only a couple of weeks ago, Premier Allan announced that we were going to legislate to protect the right of workers to work from home if they can do so, because we know in that case that workers while working from home can be more productive. It means that they can care for their families and have better lives. If you can do so, there is no reason why you should not be able to. I have seen stories that perhaps there was going to be a federal policy on working from home, until

Peter Dutton came out and you-know-what the bed and we were just able to leave that alone, by the sound of it. This government, for the last 11 years, has been on the side of Victorian workers. That will not change for the next little bit in the lead-up to the 2026 election, and it will not change for the four years after that when we wipe the floor with those opposite.

I have just gone through wage theft and industrial manslaughter – both of them were opposed by those opposite. How you can in good conscience oppose industrial manslaughter legislation in particular has me absolutely baffled. How you can come in here, vote against that and then go home and go to sleep at night, I do not quite understand. The Allan Labor government, whether it be industrial manslaughter, wage theft laws or legislating the right to work from home, will always be on the side of Victorian workers, whilst those opposite will try and rip their rights away like they did with common-law rights in WorkCover. They will oppose at every single turn us trying to make the lives of Victorian workers better. This is an important bill, and I commend it to the house.

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (12:00): I rise to talk today about the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. At its heart this bill repeals Victoria's criminal wage theft offences, renames the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and confers on that body a new complaints referral function, particularly in relation to public construction worksites. The coalition's position is clear: wage theft is wrong. It robs workers of their lawful entitlements and undermines honest businesses.

In a federation the law must be coherent and avoid duplication. The Commonwealth's wage theft offences, which came into force on 1 January this year, now cover the field. In that context, repealing Victoria's overlapping criminal offences does indeed make sense. We will not oppose this bill for that reason. But we will not give the Allan Labor government a free pass, because while this bill contains some sensible housekeeping, it also represents another missed opportunity – another Labor half-measure on integrity in public construction and on tackling the culture of lawlessness, intimidation and waste that has flourished under this government's watch.

The Commonwealth's Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Act 2024, passed by the Albanese government in December last year, makes it a criminal offence to intentionally underpay wages anywhere in Australia. The laws, as I mentioned, commenced on 1 January 2025. These new national provisions were specifically drafted to occupy the field in relation to criminal underpayment. That means the Victorian offences in the Wage Theft Act 2020 have become redundant and in some respects inoperable. We opposed the original 2020 Victorian legislation, not because we condone underpayment but because this government rammed it through during the depths of the COVID-19 shutdowns, when businesses, particularly small businesses, were struggling to survive, and because the act created an inconsistent layer of criminalisation on top of existing federal provisions. Now that the national regime exists, the overlap is unnecessary. On this narrow point Labor has finally, albeit belatedly, done the right thing.

However, the most significant new element in this bill is not about wage theft at all; it is about the Wilson review. Last year the media blew the lid off what many of us on this side have been warning about for years: entrenched misconduct, criminal infiltration and brazen intimidation by the CFMEU on Victorian government worksites, as the member for Murray Plains talked about before. We saw credible allegations of union officials having links to organised crime, of threats and coercion used to control who could work on certain sites and of bid rigging and anti-competitive behaviour driving up costs for taxpayers. These were not just isolated incidents. In fact they were part of a pattern that had been allowed to fester under former Premier Daniel Andrews and now the current Premier.

The CFMEU is not some peripheral player in Victoria's construction industry. They are embedded in Labor's Big Build projects. They bankroll campaigns and they wield much influence inside the Labor Party itself. Indeed, it took the Commonwealth government, not the Premier, to finally place the CFMEU into administration last year – a damning indictment on this government. Faced with this public exposure, the Premier announced on 15 July 2024 that she would commission an independent

review into Victorian government bodies' engagement with construction companies and unions. Just five days later Greg Wilson was appointed to lead it. Now Mr Wilson has produced a report with eight recommendations aimed at strengthening oversight, tightening procurement, improving information sharing between agencies and ensuring allegations of unlawful conduct are dealt with promptly and effectively. These recommendations were not radical. They were practical steps to protect public money and public safety. Yet what has this Allan Labor government done? Out of those eight recommendations, this bill implements just one – recommendation 1, to establish a central complaints referral function within the newly named Workforce Inspectorate Victoria.

It also supports the implementation of recommendation 7, giving the inspectorate the ability to receive reports from any person, including principal contractors. And that is it – two out of eight. The rest? We are told they are being worked on and will be the subject of further legislation later this year. Victorians have heard this before. Promises of future reform under this government have had a habit of disappearing into the long grass. Meanwhile the same toxic culture Mr Wilson identified – the intimidation of contractors, the price gouging, the featherbedding, the billion-dollar blowouts – continues unchecked or largely unchecked on worksites across the state. This is not a whole-of-government response. This is not the decisive clean-up job Victorians were promised and would expect; it is the legislative equivalent of sweeping a scandal under the rug while hoping the public moves on.

Even the one recommendation Labor is implementing is being done in the most limited way possible. This new complaints function will not have investigative powers, it cannot compel agencies to act on referrals and it cannot force outcomes. It will be a clearing house, a postbox, passing complaints along to the same agencies that have already failed to get a grip on CFMEU lawlessness in the past. That is why the Liberals and Nationals have called and will continue to call for a royal commission into misconduct on state government construction projects, a body with full coercive powers, the ability to compel witnesses, the independence to follow the evidence wherever it leads and the transparency of public hearings. Because until that happens, the Wilson review will be just another Labor talking point, a political prop used to pretend action is being taken, while the rorts, the intimidation and the waste carry on business as usual on Big Build sites across Victoria.

On the topic of wage theft, I also want to mention modern slavery while I am at it. Wage theft of course is along the spectrum from good work at one end through to modern slavery at the other end, where people cannot walk free from that situation. While Labor appears or has given the impression that they want to tackle wage theft in Victoria, they do not seem to be taking sufficient action on modern slavery within supply chains, whether it is on renewable energy with solar panels, on train rolling stock or tram rolling stock, on electric buses and much more. I have continued to call upon this Labor government to voluntarily report under Australia's Modern Slavery Act 2018, which they could actually do at any time, such as big businesses and others do in terms of reporting under this act.

When I chaired the federal parliamentary inquiry into modern slavery, our committee produced the landmark *Hidden in Plain Sight* report in 2017. That report led directly to the Modern Slavery Act 2018, introduced by the former federal coalition government. It did not just call for transparency, it called for teeth – an independent anti-slavery commissioner, penalties for noncompliance, a public repository of reports and coverage of government procurement. Government procurement at the federal level is of course covered now, but it does not cover constitutionally Victorian government procurement, which could be done, as I mentioned, through voluntary reporting.

That work taught me a simple truth: when exploitation exists in supply chains, whether in garment factories overseas or labour hire firms here in Victoria or elsewhere, good intentions are not enough. You need real enforcement, full transparency and a government prepared to hold itself to the same standard it demands of business. In fact in this very Parliament, as I mentioned, I have called on the Allan government many times to voluntarily report on modern slavery risks in its own procurement and supply chains, even though it is not required under the federal act. Public money must never fuel exploitation, and the state must lead by example. Labor's approach to the Wilson review in comparison as well fails this basic test. Just as our modern slavery inquiry demanded robust supply chain

accountability, the Wilson review calls for decisive action in construction procurement. Instead Labor has cherry-picked, watered down and delayed in this regard.

Let us be clear about what this bill does. It repeals the Victorian wage theft offences, it renames the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and it creates a central complaints referral function for matters related to public constructions, but it will not give the inspectorate investigative powers over these complaints, require agencies to act on referrals or address the remaining six Wilson review recommendations, which should be acted upon as soon as possible, nor will it establish the kind of independent, coercive inquiry that is clearly needed to clean up the sector and more. Labor says it will evaluate the impact of these changes two years after commencement. Given the scale of the misconduct and the billions at stake, that timeline is woefully inadequate.

Lastly, I note that the Liberals will not oppose this bill in the Legislative Assembly. We accept that repealing redundant state wage theft offences is sensible in light of the national law, and we support any measure, however modest, that improves complaints handling in public construction. That said, this is not enough, as I mentioned, and this Labor government must do more on this issue.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (12:10): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on this Thursday afternoon on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. I was just tuning in and listening in to the previous speaker, and I am not quite sure where the position of those opposite is on this, whether the laws before the Parliament go too far or do not go far enough. I am just a little bit uncertain as to what the position is, but what I am certain about is that the member for Tarneit's contribution articulated really well the government's position when it comes to these matters, and that is that we remain committed to and focused on supporting workers each and every day. There is a very long list of things, which the member for Tarneit and others referenced in their contributions, that we have implemented, brought through the Parliament and brought through various budget processes, programs and initiatives that support workers within local communities right across the state.

What we know and understand is that the vast majority of employers work hard to support their employees and workers, but unfortunately, there are those that deliberately target those that work for them, whether it is through bullying, intimidation or, in this instance, a deliberate or wilful lack of financial support by taking away payments that they are entitled to. These need to be dealt with, and that is why the government brought in the wage theft bill previously. The changes that we have now seen, and these have been well canvassed, go to the changes from Canberra, and isn't it good to have federal leadership when it comes to supporting workers? I know that the member for Mordialloc and a number of other members have spoken across various places within the Parliament about that leadership and the importance of being able to do that.

The bill that is before the house this early afternoon on a Thursday is making sure that both programs align in light of recognition of changes that have been brought in from Canberra. Whether it is wage theft, whether it is industrial manslaughter or whether it is the announcements that were made just last week by the Premier that go to supporting those that work from home two days a week, we remain committed to focusing on supporting workers and providing for the safeguards, the certainty and the security for workers to be able to be cared for within our state.

If I can just touch on the couple of days a week working from home, the consultation process has already started, but as we heard yesterday there has been an overwhelming response to that. To be able to move around local communities and my electorate, which is about 40 k's from the CBD, to talk to families about what that means for them and the flexibility that it means, particularly with caring for families, is fundamentally important. Having the opportunity to be able to work from home means being able to manage on a week-to-week basis those various challenges that might be presented if, for example, you were forced to go in every single day, where you may be then travelling, in a community such as mine, 10, 12, 14 or 16 hours a week. To be able to make that change gives more flexibility and indeed I think recognises the importance of supporting particularly people in growing suburbs and growing communities that are, as I mentioned before, a significant distance from where the office

might be. It is something that is recognised by the government and something that is very important to all of us on this side of the house. As I mentioned, the conversations that have been had so far have been very positive and people are very supportive of that, so I urge members over on the other side to have a think about their position on these matters.

But indeed, as I go back to earlier, the provisions that were contained within the original piece of legislation that came through on wage theft and indeed the changes that have now been reflected from Canberra go to supporting workers each and every day. The bill repeals Victoria's wage theft offences and associated record-keeping offences in light of, as I mentioned, the Commonwealth introducing similar offences intended to cover the field and making our offences inoperative. As a consequence, and as other members have touched on this afternoon, the bill repeals the inspectorate's related investigative functions and powers and renames the principal act and the inspectorate to better reflect its revised role. The Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be known as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, and the Wage Theft Act 2020 is to be renamed the Workforce Inspectorate Act 2025. Other members have also touched on that. I mentioned some of the operations of various companies and entities, and as I think was reflected in other contributions from all sides of the house, we know that various companies and entities employ people who work not just in Victoria but right across the country and in all states and territories, and having a federal model that governs wage theft is indeed something that we warmly welcome, and we commend the federal government for the decision that has been made in this space. Making better reform and making a standardised process right across each state and territory is indeed not just good for Victorians but good for Australians, and that of course is a good thing and goes back to some of those challenges that go to different states and jurisdictions and the ability to have a uniform model and a uniform structure for these matters.

What we need to constantly do is make sure that these reviews and this work are done time and time again, and it is something that we remain committed to. Of course when working with federal ministers and the federal government on these challenges that are present in the community – 'challenge' might not be the right word, because the harm that is caused by wage theft and intimidation and some of the trauma that results from those who experience workplace bullying and harassment can be very significant and severe – not for a second should we wipe these matters away and say they do not happen or they are not common, because unfortunately they are. That is not to say that I think the vast majority of people do not want to do the right thing. They want to care for those who work for them, I am sure. I am certainly sure that most people endeavour to do that. But when these instances occur it is about taking the necessary steps to be able to address them and to be able to do so in a way that is structured and stands any legal test or challenge that might arise.

What we remain committed to doing is working with the federal government and with other states and territories through various processes that exist to be able to provide for the most up-to-date, robust and comprehensive set of reforms that can be in place, because in the end this boils down to supporting people as they go about their business and go about working for their families each and every day. When I take that back to people within my local community, who I have the opportunity and the great privilege to represent and talk to through a whole range of forums and places each and every day, what we want to make sure we are doing is supporting them to be their best, to be able to support their families and to be able to invest in all of the things that we speak about in this place and outside of this place each and every day – a strong, structured and dedicated system of education, a healthcare system that supports people so that when they get sick they have the health care they need within their local communities and of course transport that enables people to get home safer and sooner as we grow by about 100,000 to 150,000 people each and every year.

We remain committed to the provisions that are in the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. This bill takes the necessary steps to align with the feds to be able to ensure that when these matters do arise – and they do, as I mentioned earlier, arise all too often – those provisions are in place and are able to withstand the various challenges that may present themselves. This is why I commend the minister and the work that has been done by the office to bring this through the house and, of course, the union

movement, which each and every day supports workers, as does this government. With those comments, I happily commend the bill to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (12:20): Acting Speaker Farnham, it is terrific to see you in the chair here today on a bill that I am sure you will have much to say on yourself at some point. The Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025 repeals the Victorian wage theft scheme following the introduction of Commonwealth laws last year through the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Act 2024 which were designed to cover that field, because as we know, the industrial relations powers sit firmly with the Commonwealth government, and seeing that the Commonwealth has now legislated around wage theft it is only right that we respect the constitution and the structure of the federation's powers and hand that back to the Commonwealth.

The bill also implements two recommendations of the Wilson review. This was a review that was established following the incredibly damning reports of criminal activities associated with and involving the CFMEU on construction sites here in Victoria and particularly construction sites that were at taxpayer expense – Big Build sites, government construction sites. Of course the CFMEU is a union with very significant ties to the Victorian Labor Party. The bill before us today implements two recommendations from the Wilson review: recommendation 1, to establish a complaints referral function within the independent statutory body Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to receive and refer complaints relating to public construction; and recommendation 7, empowering the workforce inspectorate to receive reports from any person, which includes principal contractors, and then refer them to the appropriate agency.

We have been advised that further legislation will be brought before the Parliament this year to implement the remaining recommendations of the Wilson review. We are holding our breath on this side of the house, waiting for the government to bring forward legislation that will fully implement the Wilson review and looking forward to the government making sure that they are doing everything they can to ensure that they are outlawing criminal activity on construction sites, particularly when it comes to Big Build sites and government construction sites here in Victoria, because those bombshell reports that exposed the criminal activity, the violence, the misogyny and the bullying tactics on Victorian build sites shocked every Victorian when they were exposed last year, particularly because these are sites that Victorians are paying for and these are sites that we know are having cost blowouts and time blowouts every single day.

Geoffrey Watson conducted an interim report which found that bikies were still influential within the union and that the EBA negotiations had become vulnerable to corruption. He concluded that:

... the Victorian Branch has been infiltrated by OMCGs and by organised crime figures.

He said:

... the Victorian Branch has been caught up in a cycle of lawlessness, where violence was an accepted part of the culture, and threats of violence were a substitute for reasoned negotiations.

As was exposed at the time, we know that the Premier was sent detailed evidence in 2022 of construction union officials threatening violence on Big Build sites. But what did the Premier do? She took a year to reply and then only brushed off those concerns, suggesting it was a federal issue. The Premier has been caught time and time again turning a blind eye to union corruption on Big Build sites. The Premier was the former minister for major projects here in Victoria. Over the past decade she has been the key decision-maker when it comes to these major projects, the key decision-maker when it comes to the blowouts on these projects and on the deals on these projects. Yet the Premier, as per usual, failed to take any responsibility in terms of how the government plans to prevent union corruption, violence and misogyny continuing on government construction sites. In fact it is only because the CFMEU's conduct was exposed by the media that the Allan government are actually taking any action on this issue, and that was the reason that they stood up the Wilson review. Despite

vowing that the review would look into the rotten culture in the CFMEU, it has continued to be a major issue on construction sites in this state.

The Wilson review handed down eight recommendations to tackle union corruption, but it does not go far enough. As I said before, the legislation before us today implements just two of those recommendations. When vowing to stand up the Wilson review to tackle that rotten culture – we are still waiting for the Wilson review to be fully implemented. The Allan Labor government are not serious about tackling union corruption on government construction sites. Why? Because they are in bed with the union. They are more interested in protecting their mates in the union, making sure that they are doing deals on construction sites, than actually protecting Victorian taxpayers and the people working on those sites. The allegations that have been made of the behaviour on those sites are absolutely disgusting, yet the government has still failed to implement the full Wilson review. At the time we were very, very clear that the Wilson review did not go far enough. It did not have the power to look deeply into the alleged criminal behaviour on those state government construction sites.

Only a royal commission would shine a light on the dark, dark connection between the CFMEU's behaviour and organised crime on Big Build sites. Taxpayers deserve to know how their funds are being spent and used on those sites. When you have a state that will have \$194 billion worth of debt in the coming years, when the state government will be imposing on taxpayers an interest bill of \$1.2 million an hour, Victorians deserve to know how this government is spending their money and how it is wasting their money on government construction sites to the tune of nearly \$50 billion. The government has done a deal with the union movement and is more interested in protecting its relationship with the corrupt CFMEU than it is in protecting the interests of Victorians. That is the reality of the situation here. Those opposite can claim it is not, but why aren't we standing here today implementing the full Wilson review? Why aren't we standing here today ensuring that union corruption on government construction sites cannot be permitted in any way, shape or form?

This is largely a technical bill, a bill that removes wage theft legislation because the Commonwealth has taken it on. This is not any bright idea from the government in terms of actually improving how Victorian construction sites that are funded by the taxpayer will not have organised crime, criminal activity or union corruption rife on those sites. That is why the Liberals and Nationals called for a royal commission to stamp out this behaviour. We also wanted to restore integrity, and we brought legislation to this Parliament – the Government Construction Projects Integrity Bill 2024. This would have prevented bikies and known organised criminals from gaining employment on Victorian major construction projects. But what did this government do? It is a common theme: it voted it down. Once again, this is a government that is more interested in protecting its union mates than it is in actually protecting the interests of Victorians.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:30): What a great broadside to everyone in the union movement – just hundreds of thousands of working people described in that category. It shows exactly the true values of the Liberals when they generalise about the hundreds of thousands of people that are represented by unions in our state and help build our state and our community. I want to remind the member for Kew – because the member for Kew drew an association between the cost elements in projects and the cost elements in Victoria. Let us just go to a quote from a Liberal hero – not in this Parliament and frame – none other than the former Treasurer and Premier of New South Wales Dom Perrottet. He has been rolled out for fundraisers before by Liberal colleagues through here. I think Dom's comments about cost escalations on projects are really interesting. This is what he said at the time he was leading that state and then going on to be Premier. With a building boom in new infrastructure on Australia's east coast pitting states against each other, Premier Dominic Perrottet said it was okay if costs increased from estimations at the start of projects. Mr Perrottet said:

We are talking increases and that's not unique to NSW – it's happening right across the eastern seaboard ... We have a duty to make sure we get our projects built that are value for taxpayers, but ultimately, we've got to keep going.

That is a very interesting point. Dom Perrottet was Premier and Treasurer at the time of these major projects – more tunnels than we have seen in Victoria were being built at that time. So with the categorisation of the Premier and former Premier Andrews, you make the same categorisation if you put forward the same contention around those costs and those projects, which is a direct reflection on Liberals who were serving that state for a decade, building projects that had cost escalations across the eastern seaboard. You cannot have it each way. You cannot say that cost escalations to drive project outcomes on behalf of communities are a good thing in New South Wales – remember, it is not like Dom Perrottet has been relegated to the never-never for the future, as this is a chap who gets rolled out at the member for Sandringham’s fundraisers left, right and centre as one of the great showpieces of awesomeness for the Liberal Party – and then say in Victoria that in building intergenerational projects that cost escalation is different to what was being experienced in New South Wales and that it is different to what Premier Crisafulli will experience leading up to the Olympics. It just does not stack up; it is not a serious contention. You cannot just have a swing at the government because it has got a red colour and say, ‘It’s all Labor.’ You cannot have a bet each way and say, ‘New South Wales, great. Victoria, not,’ just depending on the colour of the government and the project.

It is all on the back of this journey to this wage theft legislation and changes. It is really interesting, and I will get to some of the elements of the Wilson review in a minute. It is on the back of a storied journey, where we had labour hire protections brought in by an Andrews–Allan Labor government – an extensive reform that was chastised and opposed at the time. Wage theft – the world was going to fall in because God forbid people pay their workers what they are entitled to, not take their money, pay their super entitlements, look after them for the hard work that they put in and pay them a day’s pay, giving them the right conditions and outcomes. I was there in 2018 when the narration around this law and the opposition to it was extraordinary. We had those opposite at the time opposing this legislation and opposing industrial manslaughter legislation. That was so eloquently put forward by the member for Tarneit, absolutely calling that out. The wage theft legislation that then became the nation’s focus – and then, as the McKell Institute wrote only in 2023, a bipartisan position of the federal Parliament – originated in Victoria. It proudly started in Victoria. It is an extraordinary thing, though, that the bipartisan nature of that policy was not seen in this Parliament. We thought the fed Libs in their approach to industrial relations law were very conservative, yet those in the state Liberal scene were more at odds than federal counterparts like Peter Dutton, who was more on the side of making sure that workers were protected than the state Liberal caucus – an extraordinary thing.

So we have a situation here where we have got another iteration of federal legislation coming through that then matches the ambitions of the nation. The Albanese Labor government brought some of this legislation in, according to notes that were on my laptop, at the start of January 2025. We see a storied history now of the Andrews–Allan Labor government on the side of working people in Victoria – on their side on their wages and conditions and on making sure they come home safe each and every night, making sure it is a criminal offence if a life is lost and there is significant negligence in that space. That should just be humanity. That should just be the support that is provided to working people. And, guess what, we have got chapter 4 of this now. We have gone through industrial relations manslaughter reform. We have gone through labour hire reform and all the important protections that were brought in here and the outsourcing of that work. Now we go to wage theft, and the next journey, chapter 4, is the right to work from home, a substantial change right now. So we see the journey. We see the story. It will not be long before other jurisdictions see the benefit and merits in supporting the conditions and outcomes of working people and realising the mental load and challenges that they face already so much in our community. Maybe we will have a calling from those opposite to really join us on this bipartisan journey. Like the feds have finally seen, it was a Labor government creation out of Victoria that underpinned then the wage theft legislation that went nationally, and now we see this called out as a bipartisan position. It was not always there but is a bipartisan position now, and now we see the hallmarks of the next iteration of supporting people.

We know how important that is for gender representation in the workforce. Opposition to work from home, as I said yesterday in the grievance debate, disproportionately impacts women in the

workforce – disproportionately harms women getting back into the workforce or progressing their career or getting the superannuation they deserve by being able to have those flexible arrangements. If you are going to work each and every day and you have got to rock up as well – anyone who had to travel up the Monash this morning might think, ‘An hour and 50 in the car going up and down for people who are still trundling in for work that they might be able to do from home’ – it also disaggregates then some of that impact going forward. That is the next iteration in some of this legislation. It is good for everyone, and I just hope some of these changes we see as well.

The member for Kew made the allegation that the Premier has done nothing. Oh, sorry, there was the Wilson review – literally the same name as the member for Kew’s surname. The Wilson review, named by the Premier, was then put forward, and the actions of that are to come. I do not know what more action you can ask for with the review that happened, was worked through and went through. But I did notice some interesting things. It was not like we have seen in certain commentary – the comments and the narration by the member for Kew around all working people was extraordinary. All union people, the hundreds of thousands of people that are associated with the construction industry that are helping build our state and our community, many that live in my community who are working on, say, the Level Crossing Removal Project, built the Mordialloc Freeway, just about completed the Metro Tunnel – all construction people, apparently, were ‘looking after your mates’. What a term for working people. What a way to describe working people. It is a real warning to all Victorian workers of what the Liberals truly think of union jobs and of working people, and what they will do to their conditions and their outcomes. They will cut their conditions. They refer to them as ‘jobs for mates’. That means they are expendable. They are not in a target category of what their needs are and how we support them into the future. That is the language sneaking in from the member for Kew. It is quite clear when you say ‘jobs for mates’ of people in construction. Veterans in construction, First Nations people in construction, women working in construction, the hundreds of thousands of people in construction that help build our communities into the future – they are just jobs for mates. They are just jobs for mates in our states. That is all they are.

They are expendable to a Liberal–National agenda because they are not people they would target. In a government of Liberals, those people are expendable. That is the true warning. They say in superannuation and financial planning that past performance is not an indication of future outcome. I will tell you, in politics if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, guess what, it is a duck. And I will tell you why – labour reforms, wage theft, industrial relations manslaughter and now work from home. When you are in Victoria, the only political party that will support workers in our state is a Labor government. An Allan Labor government will always be on the side of working people in Victoria.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:40): I will try to be less theatrical than throwing laptops around like the member for Mordialloc. I mean, that is passion if I have ever seen it: throwing hardware around the chamber. I am more than happy to rise to contribute on the debate for the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. From the outset, let me be clear: wage theft is unacceptable. I do not think anyone argues with that. It does not matter whether it is a law firm in the Melbourne CBD, an orchard or a vineyard in Shepparton, a cafe in Mildura or government construction sites. If you deliberately and dishonestly withhold wages or entitlements – and I know the member for Murray Plains, listening to his contribution, made several references to withholding entitlements from a worker – then you are stealing from them, and that is wrong.

This bill repeals Victoria’s wage theft offences and transfers that responsibility fully to the Commonwealth. The Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Act 2024 now makes intentional underpayment of wages a criminal offence nationally, right across Australia. Given that the Commonwealth laws came into force on 1 January this year, it is logical to do this in the Victorian scheme, which would now overlap and cause confusion for workers and for small businesses who have to navigate some of the most complex industrial relations laws in the world. This makes

sense. It also renames the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and gives it a new role: a complaints referral function. I will come back to that later.

Right now in Mildura and across the Mallee I meet employers every single day who do the right thing. Just last week I was at a trucking company, GTS Freight Management, who employ around 300 people in several states and several locations. A lot of the logistics companies in Mildura, and there are some very large operators, have got staff – including truck drivers and those that have driven before and cannot anymore because of whatever it is, injury, family or different circumstances that lead to long-haul trucking not being an option anymore, and they progress into admin roles; it is a big, complex operation – that have been there for 20 or 30 years. These business operators are often operating on razor-thin margins, but they do everything they can to make coming to work every single day a joy, and that is demonstrated by these employees that have been there for, like I said, 20 or 30 years. But they are running on razor-thin margins, and they often get bogged down in bureaucracy, red tape and things like that. So we must ensure that we are distinguishing between a deliberate act of wage theft and an honest mistake in payroll – award interpretation or superannuation payment timing. That needs to be very, very clear. The distinction matters, because while we are cracking down, and we have to crack down on the crooks, we have also got to protect those honest small business operators from being crushed by that red tape and the fear of an innocent error becoming a criminal charge. That is why the Commonwealth's approach, which consolidates these laws into a single national framework, will give some clarity and consistency for those employers.

We have heard many members on both sides talk about the Wilson review and CFMEU corruption on government worksites. This is another very important part of this bill, and it is one that stems from the Wilson review into misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. Let us be blunt: the Wilson review was a farce. It was Labor's attempt to look like they were acting on CFMEU misconduct while carefully avoiding anything that might actually change the culture on government worksites, to protect their mates. The allegations that we have seen against the CFMEU are not just bad optics, they are corrosive of public trust, and they contribute to those billion-dollar cost blowouts on the Big Build projects that we have seen, and they are cost blowouts that every single Victorian is now paying the price for. The Liberals and the Nationals called for a royal commission – an independent forensic investigation that could compel witnesses, demand documents and truly expose what has been going on. That is really the only mechanism with the teeth to get to the bottom of these rorts, but instead the Allan Labor government gave us this review, which has produced eight recommendations, some useful, but they are being drip-fed into legislation in bits and pieces. This bill only implements recommendations 1 and 7, and we are told the rest will come later. Well, given the scale of the misconduct, later just simply is not good enough.

Coming back to the complaints referral function, the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria will now be able to receive complaints about public construction and refer them to the relevant law enforcement or regulatory body. So that is a start, but that is it – it is just a start. The inspectorate will not have the power to investigate or compel action. It will effectively be a clearing house. There are no timelines and there is no transparency. We risk ending up with a new agency and a level of bureaucracy that is just a mailbox where complaints will go in but then who knows what will happen after that? Two years until the government even evaluates the effectiveness of this approach is far too long given that we already know what is happening.

When we get to regional Victoria, I want to make it clear: this is not just a Melbourne problem. In Mildura of course we have public construction projects, government contracts and workers whose rights must be protected. But if there are rorts, corruption or misconduct in the system, it hurts us all and every Victorian pays the price for that. It drives up the cost of projects – and we have seen that – and that means, like the member for Murray Plains said earlier in his contribution, that is less money available for upgrading schools and upgrading hospitals, which we know is desperately needed, particularly in the regions, where population growth has far exceeded any forecast and hospital upgrades have not been forthcoming. It was actually good to sit down with the Minister for Health

yesterday and talk about population growth not just on the Victorian side in Mildura. We are a border community and there is population growth on the New South Wales side that we can clearly see, because often it is easier to subdivide and it is more attractive for developers to develop housing estates on the New South Wales side. They are coming over and using the Victorian healthcare system, Victorian schools et cetera, so that has to be taken into account as well. When you have these billion-dollar cost blowouts on government worksites, then of course there is less money for all of that and for the hospital upgrades that are desperately needed. So it was very productive to sit down with the Minister for Health yesterday and have a very candid conversation about that, and hopefully we will see some solutions forthcoming very, very soon.

In industries like the horticulture industry, often the media will jump on things to expose an industry that is underpaying staff. I know from growing up on the land and being married to a farmer now it is maybe one or two that have done the wrong thing – and it is absolutely the wrong thing – but for the most part our food producers and fibre producers are doing the right thing. They want to do the right thing because they need good staff and good workers to be able to get the food off the crops and onto tables in the city. Let us just be clear. Some of the stories that we have seen in the agriculture sector have been media beat-ups. I know. What a shock and surprise: a media beat-up about something that may or may not have happened – they took some footage under the cover of darkness. For the most part, our food and fibre producers do the right thing by their workers, and they will continue to do so because they are some of the hardest working people in this state, putting food on plates in the city.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (12:50): I also rise to talk about the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. I will probably spend a lot of my contribution reflecting on some of the other contributions that have been made today. I was particularly interested when the member for Murray Plains raised the point that every worker deserves to receive what they are entitled to, which should just be a matter of fact. We should all be accepting that that is a statement of truth.

Unfortunately, though, this is not borne out by the actions of the opposition when these bills repeatedly come into the Parliament. When you think back, if the opposition are the champions of the workers, which they would like to have us believe from some of their contributions today, then the question is: why did they not vote for the Wage Theft Bill 2020 when it was presented to Parliament a few years ago? Equally: why did they not vote for the industrial manslaughter bills when they were introduced a few years ago? We could go on. There was a reflection this week that it is almost 100 years since Victoria was the first state to implement a five-day week rather than a six-day week. We saw in the Premier's statement at the state conference recently the policy commitment to have an inbuilt right to work from home. How have we seen members of the opposition respond? As the member for Mordialloc pointed out yesterday in the grievance debate, we saw the shadow federal minister, the member for Goldstein, come out with some of his local cheerleaders and call it apartheid, so we know where the opposition really sits on these matters.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the member for Box Hill has moved quite a way from the bill, and I ask you to bring him back.

Paul HAMER: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, it has been a very wideranging debate. I am responding to matters that have been canvassed by previous speakers.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Excuse me, can I address the member for Box Hill, please. The member for Box Hill is being relevant. It has been a wide debate.

Paul HAMER: I do want to touch on the Wage Theft Bill, and particularly the initial Wage Theft Bill that was introduced into this place several years ago. At that point in time, as we recall, the opposition opposed the introduction of the bill. They called it politics over policy and said it was not the right time. They agreed that workers should be paid appropriately, but fundamentally their problem at that time was it was not the right time and it was about politics, not the policy. This always becomes

the problem. They are always looking for excuses to oppose legislation that provides further protections for workers. While I note that the opposition have come into the house today and said they will not be opposing this amendment bill dealing with some technical matters in light of the Commonwealth legislation that has been introduced, I think it is more symptomatic of the broader discussion and the broader issues whenever these matters arise and are before the house.

In terms of the actual bill, what is the bill actually doing? It is repealing the wage theft offences and relevant related provisions, it is renaming Wage Inspectorate Victoria as Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, and it is conferring new functions on the Workplace Inspectorate Victoria and a number of other smaller items.

As I said, the main reason for this legislation is really in recognition of the legislation that has been passed recently by the Commonwealth Parliament to legislate across the country wage theft laws and for the Fair Work Commission to have an important role in that process. I think that is a really important step. I am really pleased to see that the federal government – and again, only a federal Labor government would be doing this – is introducing federal legislation that covers all fields and covers all states.

I am actually really proud to be standing here repealing this part of the legislation, because it recognises that Victoria was actually the first state that went ahead of the pack and recognised that it was a really important issue – it was an important issue in the community, and it was an important issue for workers – that everyone could get behind, and everyone recognised that this was not about politics, this was about making sure that indeed everyone was receiving their just entitlements. Obviously we have got to that stage now where Victoria again, being the first mover in this space, is able to lead the nation in workplace protections and worker protections, which have now been largely adopted by the Commonwealth so that they can cover all workers across the nation.

I know in my own community how important the wage theft laws are. I remember that really early on in my parliamentary journey, for want of a better word, there was a local case in one of our local restaurants where they were hiring students –

Members interjecting.

Paul HAMER: I think the Blues Brothers have just walked in. There was a local business, and it was hiring students. They were international students. Their first language was not English. There was a claim of \$200,000 of underpayment of these two workers. The Migrant Workers Centre was doing a wonderful job of trying to expose this case and make sure that there was some fair compensation provided to the two students who were working at this establishment. I know they did seek some assistance and support from my office at the time, which I was more than happy to provide them because of the importance of, as I said, people getting their fair entitlements. This occurred in fact before any of the wage theft laws were in place, so we were working under the system of laws and the Fair Work Act that applied at the time. I always think back to that case and about how important it is to have those structures, such as the Wage Theft Act 2020 that we have had for several years, and how the new Commonwealth legislation will be in cases such as this, making sure that all workers, whether they have been here for their entire lives or they are just studying as students, get what they deserve. On that, I will commend the bill to the house.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the Consul-General of Pakistan Wajid Hassan Hashmi. I would also like to acknowledge the mayor of the City of Merri-bek Cr Helen Davidson.

*Members***Minister for Climate Action***Absence*

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Environment will answer questions for the portfolios of energy and resources, climate action and the SEC.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, yesterday the Minister for Health in her answer said that an investigation was still being completed by Ambulance Victoria. The minister has subsequently advised me that that investigation has now been completed, and I wondered whether she might be given an opportunity to correct the record in relation to her answer yesterday.

The SPEAKER: I will take the point of order on notice.

Brad Battin: On a further point of order, Speaker, on Tuesday the Premier was asked a question in relation to the regulator visiting a centre a month after the date that it had been ordered to close and it was still operating. In her response she said:

In terms of the specific question around the activities of the independent regulator, I very clearly will need to seek advice on the way the regulator conducts investigations ...

I was wondering if the Premier has that advice and can make it available to the house.

The SPEAKER: I will take that point of order on notice as well.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Early childhood education and care**

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): My question is to the Minister for Government Services. Yesterday the Premier said of a man who was sacked in 2020 after an investigation found he was grooming and kissing toddlers that ‘immediate steps have been taken to cancel his working with children check’. Why does this man still have a working with children check now?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:04): Thank you for the question. Of course this side of the house continues its good work under the leadership of the Premier to protect the safety of our children and their wellbeing across our education system and across our childcare system. That is why we moved in April to make changes –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, in what world is it good work when a person continues to have a working with children check five years after they have been investigated for grooming children in childcare centres in Victoria?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition knows how to raise a point of order. The member for Mordialloc is warned. The minister to come back to the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS: We look forward to that review handing down the results in the near future, and that is why we commissioned the urgent review, in order to overview –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is very narrow, relating to why an individual retains a working with children check. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to that narrow question.

The SPEAKER: The minister still has 2 minutes and 22 seconds to answer the question. I ask the minister to come back to the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS: As the Premier indicated in her answers yesterday and has alluded to the fact that a process has begun around that individual in particular from –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 requires the minister to be direct and succinct in her answer. Given the fact that the question was only 11 words long, I would say that the minister has not been direct or succinct so far in her answer, considering how short the question was.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS: We have strengthened the regulations to ensure that there is more transparency across the system, and we are taking action in regard to this individual. The safety of children is our absolute number one priority.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Can the minister confirm this man can still work with children in junior sports teams, Scouts, schools, foster care, kinship care and play facilities, amongst many other places, with unsupervised children?

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (14:08): Thank you for the question. There is an act that oversees the worker-screening process and the unit that processes I think it is probably thousands of applications per year for either new working with children checks or renewals. The Worker Screening Act sets out criteria for people who are required to have a working with children check and –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is obviously debating the answer by clearly trying to outline that it seems to be okay that this person has a working with children check in Victoria based on the act, rather than acting and cancelling it, like was promised this week.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, points of order are to be raised correctly. The minister was answering the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS: In regard to who needs a working with children check in what environment – there were a number of environments listed by the Leader of the Opposition just then – if it is about a childcare centre –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister continues to debate the question. How long does it take to cancel a working with children check for someone?

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume her seat. Points of order are to be raised correctly. The minister was answering the question.

Natalie HUTCHINS: In regard to the individual that has been alluded to in this question, there is a process underway and I am not going to supersede that.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): Working from home is not just great for workers and their families, as good as it is for workers and their families. We also know it is good for businesses in our suburbs, those small and family businesses that are the lifeblood of our suburbs, because we know that when people work from home they spend more time and more money closer to home. What they are doing with that time and money is supporting their great small, local, family-run businesses – the bakeries, the cafes down the road.

This morning, along with the Minister for Small Business and Employment and the member for Preston, we had the opportunity to experience a great local business, Tyler's Milkbar in Preston, to give them a shout-out, run by sisters Samantha and Alli Fisher. I want to share with the house

something that Sam said when she was asked, although clearly she is not working from home – she is in her great small business – about how working from home supports her business. She said:

I can wholeheartedly say that people working from home is why we have succeeded and grown as a business.

When people are working from home, we get a steadier flow of customers ... lots more parents coming in, spending time with their kids.

I could not put it better than that. This is proof that flexible work puts money in local communities and keeps small businesses like Tyler's Milkbar going. It is proof that it supports jobs, supports families and supports communities. As we heard this morning too – and I know the member for Preston is a regular, so he has seen it for himself – this means that Sam and Alli can plan ahead and hire more staff, putting that investment back into their local community.

There are some that do not support this. There are some who want to take it away – some in the federal Liberal Party who had the gall to compare this to apartheid, supported by the member for Brighton of course with his demands around the public service. Only Labor will protect your right to work from home.

Early childhood education and care

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier guarantee that this individual who was dismissed for sexual misconduct in 2020 will have his working with children check cancelled by close of business today?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): In answering the member for Kew's question, I reiterate what I have said previously in this place in regard to this instance: that it does demonstrate that the system does need to be strengthened to keep children safe. As I have also already advised the house, there is a process underway to cancel this individual's working with children check. Further to that, this underscores the importance of the rapid review that is underway and will be handed to the government tomorrow, and we will take further action to keep children safe.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, the question was about cancelling a specific working with children check, not in relation to a rapid review that is still letting this person work in childcare centres and with kids across Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I have asked you repeatedly to raise points of order correctly. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:14): If the Premier cannot guarantee that this individual's working with children check will not be cancelled by the end of today, on behalf of all Victorian families I ask: how long will this man continue to have an active working with children check and be able to work with children?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): I reiterate again that there is a process underway to cancel this individual's working with children check, and I understand that the system does need to be strengthened, which is why, as Premier, we have already moved to strengthen the worker-screening unit. It is why we have strengthened and introduced a registration system for early childcare workers.

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I asked the Premier: for how much longer will this individual have an active working with children check?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, opposition members are repeatedly defying your ruling that the common understanding is that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. So I ask that you rule this point of order out of order and let ministers on their feet answer the questions.

Brad Battin: In relation to the point of order and to support the point of order from the member for Kew, quite clearly, if it assists the house, we will make a commitment to not get up and re-ask the question in points of order if the government commit to answering these questions that are putting children at risk in Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, that is not a point of order. On the point of order, the Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: In concluding my answer, I say this very clearly as both the Premier and as a parent: I have been clear that the system needs to be strengthened, and I will act to strengthen the system, implementing the review that is being undertaken right now to keep children in this state safe.

Ministers statements: working from home

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:17): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's bold plan to enshrine Victorians' right to work from home and the benefits it will have on our economy. Working from home works for families and it is good for productivity. Flexible working arrangements are utilised by workers and businesses alike, with more than a third of Australian workers regularly working from home. It cuts congestion, it saves money and it gets more people working. Those who are parents, have caring responsibilities or have disabilities are able to enter the workforce in a way that works for them and their families.

When it comes to the economy, it comes down to the three 'p's – population, participation and productivity – and this policy goes to the heart of our growing economy. In Victoria our population is growing. Thanks to work from home, workforce participation is 4.4 per cent higher now than before the pandemic, with female workforce participation at a historic high, and that means a larger and more productive workforce and a growing economy.

And work from home is good for business. It helps Victorian businesses attract top talent. There is a startup right here in Victoria called WORK180. Employers are competing for talent and, for most, flexibility is a key priority. WORK180 helps workers easily search and compare thousands of employers based on the workplace policies and the benefits that matter most to them. They have put out a great report this year called *What Women Want 2025*, and it shows exactly why we are doing this. For respondents the biggest priority for the last two years was a right to work from home.

I encourage all workers and businesses, big or small, to take part in the consultation currently underway. It is with their input that we will be able to introduce legislation that works for businesses and employees, and we want to ensure that our laws are fair and reflect the practical experience of people working from home.

Early childhood education and care

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:19): My question is to the Premier. It has been six weeks since the horrific allegations of Joshua Brown have been made public. Since then, the government has failed to implement the Ombudsman's 2022 recommendations to strengthen the working with children check system, voted down legislation to amend child protection laws to keep predators out of childcare centres, refused to create an independent childcare watchdog to replace the failed regulator and allowed a known predator to hold a working with children check despite sexual misconduct against children. Why has the government failed to take action to protect children in Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): In rejecting the claim made at the end of the Leader of the Opposition's question, I will now outline to the house the action that the government has taken since Victoria Police outlined those most horrific allegations of abuse. When Victoria Police was in a position to make those allegations public, the response from the government was to move immediately to introduce the registration scheme for early childhood workers. This was something

that had been discussed for some time at federal and state levels, but we decided to act immediately, not wait for a national system to be in place. That is why today there is a registration system in place. If I am recalling the number correctly from the Minister for Children, there are some 11,000 workers now on that registration system.

We have moved to ban personal devices from early childhood settings from the end of September, again not waiting for a national system to be in place. We have also, as a result of work taken back in April – work that has been undertaken by the Attorney and the Minister for Government Services – strengthened the worker-screening unit with regard to the working with children check, which is why we have now already had a stronger system put in place in terms of the information that can be shared by regulators to the worker-screening unit. Also we immediately established the rapid review being led by Jay Weatherill and Pam White, and the purpose of this rapid review was to get the expert advice – and Jay and Pam have been talking to many across the sector – because it comes with that purpose of understanding that the system needs to be strengthened.

I am determined to act, as Premier, to strengthen the safety systems around the early childhood settings, remembering too that these early childhood settings sit in a context where there are regulatory responsibilities between jurisdictions and also information needs to be shared between jurisdictions, which is why the Attorney will be leading work tomorrow at the national meeting of attorneys-general to deal with the question of a national working with children check – arrangements that do need to be in place. Finally, the rapid review that will be received by the government at the end of tomorrow will provide further advice on urgent action to be taken, and I say very clearly that we will be implementing all of these recommendations, moving with urgency to continue to support the safety of children in our early childhood settings.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:23): Given the rapid review is to be handed down tomorrow, will the Premier recall Parliament on Monday to pass urgent legislation that is required to protect children in this state?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): The rapid review will be received by the government tomorrow, and I have been clear that we will be adopting all of those recommendations. I think it is reasonable, and I think most people would take the reasonable view, that given the significance and the importance of the work there will be time needed for the government to take the advice. I have been clear, and I have said this publicly, that we will be moving with urgency to implement the recommendations. I reject the proposition from the Leader of the Opposition. The government has moved to take action in this area, and we will move in a way that also places the safety of children front and centre – not the politics that the Leader of the Opposition is pursuing, but the safety of children.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question is very direct: will the Premier recall Parliament next week?

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: working from home

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:24): On this side of the chamber nothing gets us out of bed more than protecting workers, whether it is workers working from home or workers working at a worksite. I am very pleased to update the house on the guidelines WorkSafe is preparing on work from home, because we do know work from home is good for employers, good for employees, good for gender equality and good for people with mobility issues and disabilities. The WorkSafe guidance that is underway now will embed work from home in the guidance for employers as well as employees. It will provide clear health and safety rules for employers, as well as mental health support for workers. WorkSafe will engage during the consultation process in the development of the legislation and will also be providing any further guidance that is required to make sure we embed work from home as a right.

Speaker, it is very difficult to work out, and you have always said we can compare and contrast. We know that earlier this year the member for Brighton said he would have all the public servants back at their cubicles. We also know the member for Goldstein just recently wrote a very well known opinion piece where he called it professional apartheid not once, not twice but wrote 'professional apartheid' three times in that article. We also know the member for Lowan, to her credit –

Jacinta Allan: It's a shame she's not here.

Ben CARROLL: Yes, it is a shame, Premier. She said on Tuesday in the chamber that on that side they 'absolutely are committed to working from home' and it is a policy position 'I strongly believe in'. We look forward to the shadow cabinet meeting on Monday and hearing all about it. When it comes to the Leader of the Opposition, in April he said he did not have a position. It was a bit like nuclear: 'I'll wait until after the election.'

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are an opportunity for the government to countenance their policy decisions, not to talk about the opposition. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to that.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Deputy Premier, as he has just indicated, was quoting directly from the Leader of the Opposition, and it has been ruled many times in this place that it is entirely appropriate for ministers on their feet to compare and contrast the policy position of government with that on the other side.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Ben CARROLL: Just for Hansard's sake, I will repeat, from the *Herald Sun* on 7 April:

Mr Battin insisted the state opposition currently has no position on WFH.

"We haven't got a position ...

Housing affordability

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:28): I have got a question for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Real estate agents are notorious for underquoting on house prices, causing disappointment and expense when buyers pay for building reports and turn up to auctions only to discover the reserve price is way above the advertised price range. A recent analysis of 25,000 houses showed that more than half of them sold at above the upper limit of the advertised price range. This often affects first home buyers and young people. The government has not released a 2022 report on a review of the laws regulating Victoria's property market. Will the government now release that report?

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:28): I very much thank the member for Brunswick for his question, because I have been waiting patiently over here all year for a question, and it has come from the Greens political party.

Jacinta Allan: Wait no longer.

Nick STAIKOS: Absolutely. Firstly, the report that the member for Brunswick refers to is a cabinet-in-confidence document. The second thing I would say is that I agree with the member for Brunswick, as does the government, that underquoting is an unethical practice. It is a dishonest practice. That is why since 2017 this government has had the strongest underquoting laws in Australia. We have established the underquoting taskforce. That taskforce has monitored 2500 sales campaigns, and it has issued fines amassing more than \$2 million. Because our underquoting taskforce has been so successful, New South Wales has copied our underquoting taskforce. That underquoting taskforce has been so successful that it is now a permanent enforcement arm of Consumer Affairs Victoria.

But I will also say that this government will not rest until we stamp out underquoting, because it is a very, very dishonest practice. Earlier this year this Parliament passed a bill that increased fines for underquoting to more than \$48,000 every time an agent is caught underquoting. Those opposite voted against that bill. It is this side of the house that is committed to ensuring we stamp out underquoting, because it is unethical because it draws people into a sales campaign when all along they could not afford that property in the first place. Too often the victims of underquoting are young first home buyers. We are committed to stamping it out. That is why Consumer Affairs is currently in VCAT and in the Federal Court pursuing underquoting. It is why this government has a commitment to stamp out that dishonest practice.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:31): It sounds like we will not be seeing the report that I asked about, but given we have a shared interest in stamping out underquoting I should point out that that analysis of 25,000 sales took place under the regime introduced several years ago by the government, so there is room to further improve the regime. Even the Real Estate Institute of Victoria has now said that it supports publishing reserve prices ahead of auction to increase transparency. Will the government legislate mandatory disclosure of reserve prices before auction?

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:32): In answer to the supplementary question, I repeat what I said on the substantive question, and that is that this government acknowledges that there is always room for improvement. That is why since 2017 we have continued to step up our enforcement regime when it comes to underquoting by establishing the underquoting taskforce, by making it a permanent arm of Consumer Affairs Victoria's enforcement framework and by increasing penalties for underquoting. Every step of the –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance. I will not repeat the question; the minister knows what it is.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question.

Nick STAIKOS: The member for Brunswick mentioned the REIV. The REIV are one of my stakeholders. I continue to work with all stakeholders, including the industry and including consumer advocates, to ensure that we have the best laws in place, because being the Minister for Consumer Affairs is about ensuring fairness and equity for all Victorians.

Ministers statements: working from home

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:33): Working from home works. It works for families, it works for the economy and it works for our roads. Why is it good for our roads? Because when you are working from home you are not on those long commutes and you get much more time back in your day. Freeing up the roads from these commutes is also good for productivity. It means more efficient freight movements on that last mile to get our goods to market. It means more time for Victorian families to spend doing the things that they love and less on the things that they do not. It also means that you can duck down to the shop on your lunchbreak and get the things you need off the shopping list, delivered by hardworking truck drivers. These truck drivers stand to benefit too, getting their jobs done more efficiently and getting home to spend more time with their families. It is good for the family budget too. Fewer trips in the car means less money spent putting fuel in it, and this builds on the work that we have done to reduce the cost of keeping the car on the road, with free rego for thousands of apprentices, free L and P tests and discounts for safe drivers.

Of course we know there will always be people who rely on the network to get around, which is why we are continuing to deliver smoother and more reliable journeys with record investment in our roads. We are investing \$976 million – almost \$1 billion – this year in maintaining the roads Victorians rely on for all purposes, more than any other government has done before us. We will have crews out soon fixing roads across the state so people can get on with their day, get to school or sport or just get out

and about after work. All of this is made possible with the Allan Labor government's commitment to Victorians' right to work from home wherever they are able to do so.

Country Fire Authority Bendigo station

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:35): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. The Labor government promised Bendigo a new fire station in 2019, but work has not yet begun. A temporary station –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: The Labor government promised Bendigo a new fire station in 2019, but work has not yet begun. A temporary station was built at a cost of \$2.4 million, not including the land value, and completed in 2022. It has never been used and continues to sit idle. Is it because of Labor waste like this that Victorians are now getting emergency services tax bills in the mail slugging them an extra \$3 billion?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:36): I thank the member for his question. The answer is no.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:36): Golden Square fire station sat unused for six months due to water pressure issues. Why must Victorians pay –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask members to cease reflecting on the Speaker. The Leader of the Nationals will be heard in silence, Premier.

Danny O'BRIEN: Golden Square fire station sat unused for six months due to water pressure issues. Why must Victorians pay the price because Labor cannot manage projects and cannot manage money?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals and the Premier will come to order. I do not want to have to remove you from the chamber, Premier.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:37): I thank the member for his supplementary question, the premise of which I reject. It is great to see the CFA in their new Golden Square digs.

Ministers statements: working from home

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:38): Victoria's economy is in very good health, with solid economic growth, business investment and booming exports. Despite some people trying to run down Victoria's success, global leaders such as Orora beverages, Mondelēz, Arnott's, George Weston Foods and, my favourite, MECCA are choosing Victoria to establish and expand their operations.

Jacinta Allan: What's your favourite product?

Colin BROOKS: Skin care. This is a vote of confidence in Victoria's economy and our highly skilled workforce. We know that working from home is good for workers and it is good for business. Of course not everyone can work from home, and I want to particularly acknowledge those workers on production lines, on shop floors, in factories and in labs, who have made Victoria the nation's manufacturing powerhouse. Their efforts are valued and essential to our shared economic success. These workers understand what the Liberals do not – that workplace flexibility is not apartheid, it is good for everybody. Working from home expands the talent pool for businesses to draw from. They can access broader geographic talent, including those in regional areas, fostering economic

development outside of Melbourne and vice versa. Attracting diverse talent also spurs the innovation and competitiveness vital for Victoria's economic growth.

The evidence is in, and working from home is a productivity winner. The elimination of commuting saves time and energy and reduces congestion for freight and business transport. Families may benefit from a partner who is able to manage the house because they are working from home or just getting around without the extra traffic. Not every worker can work from home, but chances are they know and love someone who can and who needs to.

Constituency questions

Malvern electorate

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:40): (1240) My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning, who has now designated a large number of activity centres in my Malvern electorate – more activity centres than in any other electorate across Victoria. My question to the minister is: how is it fair to designate Tooronga station and Glen Iris station as activity centres while the Labor government refuses to remove the level crossings at these stations? For the Labor government to approve more high-rise apartments, bringing more traffic and more congestion around Tooronga and Glen Iris stations, while refusing to remove those level crossings, is just unfair. The Australian level crossing assessment model independently ranks the Tooronga and Glen Iris level crossings as the 39th- and 53rd-worst in Victoria, but Labor still refuses to remove them. The minister cannot have it both ways: she cannot impose more high-density living that will only make congestion worse while keeping two of the worst level crossings in the state.

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:42): (1241) My question is to the Minister for Education. In the 2023–24 state budget the government committed \$2.1 million to upgrading the main building and classrooms at Wallington Primary School. This was in addition to the \$580,000 previously invested in our wonderful local school, which has proudly served the Wallington community since 1868. Last year I informed the house that an architect had been appointed and commenced these upgrades, and now I am pleased to report that the project has reached practical completion, with the new learning space in use. We look forward to officially opening that upgraded facility in coming months. Minister, how is this investment into Wallington Primary School improving the outcomes for those students?

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:42): (1242) My question today is to the Minister for Environment, and the information I seek is that the detail related to the cancellation of the promised Marlo-to-Conran bike path be released. In the wake of the Black Summer fires of 2019–20 there were commitments made to that area – \$13.5 million was committed to a shared pathway between Marlo and Cape Conran and also to potable water supply. What has happened in that time is we have recently had made a very casual announcement that that shared bike path is not going ahead. The community thought that money was signed, sealed and delivered and this project was ready to go. Amongst the information we want to know is why has it been cancelled, and we also want to know where the \$13.5 million has gone. I ask for that general information to be released.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:43): (1243) My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. How many students in the Sunbury electorate have accessed the Allan Labor government's school start bonus? As members know, this is a significant and important program that goes towards school costs for families within local communities. Indeed it is something that many local constituents talk to me about. It builds upon this government's significant and important investments in the breakfast club, the school camp and excursions fund, the Glasses for Kids program and many more. I

look forward to the minister's response and thank the minister and the entire team for a significant investment in education within my community.

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:44): (1244) My question is to the Minister for Education, and I ask: when will the minister review the unfairness of school funding, which has ignored Bayside Catholic schools like St Mary's Primary in Hampton? St Mary's Primary recently celebrated a century of caring for Bayside children. Established in a church in 1924, the original school building was then built in 1954. Led by principal Steele Anderson, the school is exceptional but requires modernisation. The central school staircase is a converted steel external fire escape that is brutal in nature and has led to incidents where children have needed medical care. The staircase is also not accessible, and children with accessibility issues do not have access to the school's second floor. The library has been built with less durable materials and needs upgrade as well as the addressing of poor ventilation and insulation issues. A number of second-floor classrooms in the original building require significant attention, with roof leaks forcing closure of the learning spaces. Combined with ageing demountables that are asbestos ridden, there is just not enough learning space in the school.

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:45): (1245) My question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. When will the minister meet with my constituents about the Newhaven Jetty restoration options for pedestrian, fishing and boating use? The Newhaven Jetty is one of Victoria's most popular holiday destinations and was closed in May 2024 to protect public safety. Since then, petitions, gatherings, protests, media coverage and strong community advocacy have called for clarity on the issues and a plan to repair and reopen it. Our community rely on this asset to fish, walk and tie up boats, and it is an attraction for the many visitors holidaying in our beautiful Bass region. It is important we work with the local community, understand desired activities and engage the right stakeholders. The Newhaven community is eager to collaborate with the Allan Labor government on a way forward, and I want to thank passionate locals Amanda Keilar, Saltwater's Ben Dennis, Lisa Webster, and the Newhaven Residents Group, including Noel and Pat, for their advocacy.

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:46): (1246) My constituency question is for the Minister for Children in the other place. Why is the government shutting Parentline Victoria, a service relied on by many parents and carers in my electorate of Ringwood? Parents and carers in my electorate have been in contact with my office following reports in the *Herald Sun* at the end of July that Parentline will close in October of this year. They are anxious about the loss of this vital support and have joined hundreds of people in signing an open letter calling for the service to be saved. For more than two decades Parentline has been a lifeline. It offers free confidential counselling from qualified social workers, psychologists, family therapists and nurses. It supports families through stress, crisis and the hardest days of parenting. It services on average 18,000 calls per year. This decision comes at a time when parents and carers are already extremely anxious following recent reports of systemic failures in child and school care settings. I call on the government to reverse this decision and ensure ongoing funding for this service.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:47): (1247) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and my question is: when will residents see more-frequent bus services in Wollert? Many residents have spoken to me about the bus services and their concern that there is a lack of services and too few services on existing routes. This makes it difficult for students to get to the new schools that we have built and residents to get to all the new facilities in the area as well as access and connect to the public transport corridors. I have been a strong advocate for these bus services, including new routes and more services on existing routes, on behalf of constituents, so it

was good news to see in the budget of the Allan Labor government just recently announced that there will be more bus services and bus routes.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:48): (1248) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the question I ask is: why has this government created one of Heathcote's biggest power crises without securing a reliable alternative supply? This government has allowed Solstice Energy to cut off Heathcote's gas supply 10 years early, forcing businesses like Palling Bros and Segafredo's Bakery into costly retrofits and pushing our already unreliable electricity network to breaking point. Nearly 1200 homes and businesses across 10 regional communities will lose gas by the end of next year, including many in my electorate. More than two-thirds of the affected customers use gas for cooking and hot water, and half rely on gas for heating. The Costerfield mine, which employs several hundred people, already relies on diesel generators due to limited power availability. Our local businesses warn this decision would trigger outages, job losses and closures the region simply cannot afford. It is not fair that this government's ideological war on gas continues to drive up costs and reduce choice for families and businesses in regional Victoria.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:49): (1249) My constituency question is for the Premier. What is the Victorian Labor government doing to protect the rights of working people to work from home? Working from home works for families and it is good for the economy. According to the 2021 ABS census at least 36 per cent of locals across Merri-bek worked from home. That is over 33,500 residents. Whether you are from Pascoe Vale, Coburg or Brunswick West, working from home continues to give families more time with loved ones and less time on the train, tram and in traffic. When we give workers back their time to be parents, carers, volunteers or simply to live, we create a fairer, more sustainable Victoria. But it is not just good for the workers themselves. It brings life to our local shopping strips and small businesses whilst helping to make kinder and school pick-ups much easier for many parents. Whilst not everyone can work from home, everyone can benefit. That is why we have launched the community consultation on the proposed new laws, which will provide people who can reasonably do their jobs from home two days a week the right to do so across the public and private sectors. We want to hear from employees and businesses to ensure the proposed laws reflect the real-world experience of working from home: what is fair, what is practical and what is already working in many workplaces. As part of this, the message from the Victorian Labor government is very clear: we will make working from home a right, not a request. We will enshrine it in law.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on a number of unanswered questions, I ask that these get answered; they are well overdue. There are two questions unanswered by the Minister for Finance. These are questions on notice 2550 and 2551. There are 23 questions unresponded to by the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. These are questions on notice 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2443, 2444, 2445, 2446, 2447, 2448, 2449, 2450, 2522, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2526, 2527, 2528 and 2529. Also, a number for the Treasurer: questions on notice 2419, 2420, 2421, 2422, 2423, 2424, 2425, 2512 and 2520. I would appreciate responses for my constituents, please.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to hand your list to the clerks, please.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I wish to raise with you a number of outstanding questions that I know you have written to the Premier about previously asking for a response, and the Premier so far has been unable to respond. Question 1120 was due in June; 1094 was due in May; 1060 was due in April; also 1049, which was due in April; and 984, which was due in March. Speaker, I am concerned because the former Premier did not have an inability to answer questions and these questions are quite delayed in response.

The SPEAKER: Points of order are not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. If you would like to hand your list to the clerks, we will have them addressed.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:53): The member for Werribee asked for an action during yesterday's constituency questions, and I therefore rule the member's question out of order.

Bills

Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:53): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

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

'9A Mid-year report

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

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

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

'18A Tabling requirements

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

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

- (a) the end of the next following fourth month of the financial year; or
- (b) either –

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

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

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

- (2) In section 46(2)(b) of the Principal Act, for “laid before each House of the Parliament within 14 sitting days of that House after the request.” **substitute** “transmitted to each House of the Parliament on or before –
- (i) the expiration of the fourth sitting day of that House after the request; or
 - (ii) if the first sitting day of a House of the Parliament after the request is more than 14 days after the request, the expiration of the fourteenth day after that request.”.
- (3) After section 46(3) of the Principal Act **insert** –
- “(3A) The clerk of each House of the Parliament must cause a report transmitted under subsection (1) or (2) to be laid before the House on the day on which it is received or on the next sitting day of the House.
- (3B) If the relevant Minister proposes to transmit a report to the Parliament on a day on which neither House of the Parliament is sitting, the relevant Minister must –
- (a) give at least one business day’s notice of the relevant Minister’s intention to do so to the clerk of each House of the Parliament; and
 - (b) give the report to the clerk of each House on the day indicated in the notice.
- (3C) The clerk of each House must –
- (a) notify each member of the House of the receipt of a notice under subsection (3B)(a) on the same day that the clerk receives that notice; and
 - (b) give a copy of the report to each member of the House as soon as practicable after the report is received under subsection (3B)(b); and
 - (c) cause the report to be laid before the House on the next sitting day of the House.
- (3D) A copy of a report that is given to the clerks under subsection (3B)(b) is taken to have been published by order, or under the authority, of the Houses of Parliament.
- (3E) The publication of a document by the relevant Minister under subsection (3B)(b) is absolutely privileged and the provisions of sections 73 and 74 of the **Constitution Act 1975** and any other enactment or rule of law relating to the publication of the proceedings of the Parliament apply to and in relation to the publication of the document as if it were a document to which those sections applied and had been published by the Government Printer under the authority of the Parliament.”.
- (4) **Insert** the following note at the foot of section 46 –
- “Note**
- Section 4 of the **Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978** sets out values that a Minister should demonstrate in the carrying out of the Minister’s public duties. These values include accountability.”.
3. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 19 –
- ‘19A Annual reports of State-owned corporations and other bodies**
- (1) After section 53A(4) of the **Financial Management Act 1994** **insert** –
- “(4A) The relevant Minister must not direct the body to submit its annual report to the relevant Minister on a particular date.”.
- (2) For section 53A(5) of the Principal Act **substitute** –
- “(5) Subject to subsections (6) and (7), the relevant Minister must cause the annual report to be transmitted to each House of the Parliament on or after the next following 15 October and before the earlier of –
- (a) the next following 31 October; or
 - (b) either –
 - (i) the expiration of the fourth sitting day of that House after the annual report is received by the relevant Minister; or
 - (ii) if the first sitting day of a House of the Parliament after the annual report is received by the relevant Minister is more than 14 days after the date of receipt of the annual report, the expiration of the fourteenth day after the annual report is received by the relevant Minister.

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

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance)
(14:54): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In doing so I would like to make a brief contribution. The Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 makes commonsense changes that support the government to deliver on our fiscal strategy and, importantly, maintain Victoria’s credit rating. These changes improve accountability and transparency across the public sector and its entities, remove outdated aspects of existing legislation and ultimately better reflect the needs of an increasingly dynamic financial and economic environment. The government engaged with the crossbench on the bill in the other place, and the Greens proposed amendments which the government ultimately accepted. I want to place on record my thanks to the Greens political party for their engagement on the bill and suggestions that do contribute further to increasing transparency and improved reporting requirements with regard to financial management.

The first amendment is a requirement for the midyear financial report to include reporting on Treasurer's advances approved in the first half of the financial year. This aligns with the bill's intention to improve financial reporting and with the Treasurer's stated desire to increase transparency over the use of Treasurer's advances. The second amendment requires annual reports to be transmitted to Parliament by 15 October, or the earlier of 14 calendar days after the relevant minister receives the report and 31 October. This will result in annual reports being transmitted to the Parliament earlier than current arrangements and in a timely fashion.

These are sensible amendments that contribute to the intention of the bill, unlike the criticism from those opposite, which was simply a counterproductive and reckless position to take. Those opposite are continuing to live in the Dark Ages and stop progress with their opposition to this bill, while the government takes action to strengthen financial accountability in this state, enhance further planning and ensure that the public sector is resilient to future challenges. I commend the amendments.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:57): I will start by acknowledging that these amendments were ready to be dealt with by the house yesterday, but the government could not find a minister that could deal with the amendments yesterday and so the house, for the first time that I am aware of, could not deal with the amendments on the day they were ready to be dealt with by this chamber. The minister, as I think I heard him say, yesterday was working from home.

Danny Pearson interjected.

James NEWBURY: Oh, he was in Darwin, sorry – not even in the state.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Brighton to come back to the Council's amendments.

James NEWBURY: I understand, and I do acknowledge that the former speaker sledged the opposition and of course that was not on the amendments either, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, come back to the Council's amendments.

James NEWBURY: On these Council amendments, which were listed on the notice paper yesterday, the reason they were not dealt with by this house yesterday when they were listed on the notice paper is because the government could not find a minister to deal with them. So that is why we are dealing with them today. They were on the notice paper yesterday and were not dealt with.

In relation to the bill, what this bill does is reduce financial transparency. In general terms, it reduces financial transparency. That does not mean there are not amendments in the bill, which I spoke to in the debate initially, that are meritorious. There are, but what this bill does is reduce financial transparency. It reduces the number of financial reports that will now be provided to the Victorian community, full stop. The net number of reports that are provided to the community will be reduced, in one part because the department claimed that it was difficult to work hard around an election. We asked in relation to the instances where elections have occurred while this act has been in place whether there has ever been a problem, and they said no. So one does have to wonder whether it was an administrative decision or a political decision. I suspect, like everything with this government, hiding is always the first choice, and the reason why there has been a reduction in financial transparency is because the government does not want it.

In relation to the amendments, what these amendments seek to do is meritorious. The Greens and the government and the opposition have had discussions about the issues that the Greens have raised through these amendments. They were very good, fair and reasonable discussions about the issues that were raised. That is why I suspect that in the Council the government accepted those amendments, because they were aware that the Greens, who had put them forward, and the coalition were supportive of them in principle. It does not mean to say that they are perfect, and please, I would not want the house or the members that moved them to take that as a reflection on what has been moved, other than to say it is something but it is not perfect. I suspect the reason we have not got to a point of perfection is because the government would not have agreed to it.

We have two amendments, the first dealing with Treasurer's advances and the reporting of Treasurer's advances, which improves the current system. Integrity experts have spoken about Victoria's giant slush fund and how Victoria's use of Treasurer's advances is way out of pace with any other state and the Commonwealth combined and said there needs to be greater transparency around Treasurer's advances. I do note the new Treasurer, when she came into the job, said that she did have concerns around Treasurer's advances but has done nothing about it. I understand that a review was put in place early on of some nature around Treasurer's advances, but like the Silver review, it has gone nowhere, and clearly it was not a rapid review, as the member for Evelyn rightly said. The Treasurer's advances are one great big slush fund for this government that are not accountable. At the end of the day we are talking about Victorians' money, and so there should not be off-the-books spending that is dealt with separately, that is only accounted for publicly previously once a year and now with this amendment twice a year. Twice a year is actually not good enough. It should be more, and there were conversations about whether there could be accountability measures put in place to ensure reporting was monthly or monthly from points of spend, but the government made it clear that it would be too difficult and perhaps too transparent for it to be greater than once every six months. This amendment improves the current system – there is no doubt about it. I would not want the members that have moved this amendment to think that we believe otherwise. We do think it improves the system, but as I said earlier, it is not perfect.

When it comes to the tabling of reports, which is the second set of amendments, it again improves the system but, again, not as perfectly as could be the case. We know that the government times annual reports for a particular day so that we see mountains of annual reports tabled in a way that no-one can meaningfully go through them. The information overload is such that it is difficult to fully understand the level of spend, the level of misspend, of this government. These amendments seek to deal with that by putting stricter timelines around the tabling of those reports.

I do note that an additional measure that was considered as part of the discussions was around the Minister for Finance's ability to exempt the tabling of reports. Many members of this chamber will remember the extremely long list on the last annual tabling day where the minister exempted multiple pages of a very small font list of reports. From memory, hundreds of reports were exempted – well over a hundred were exempted, from memory – from being tabled within the adequate timeline. This amendment does not fully deal with some of those probity issues. Tightening the timeframes and providing transparency around when the reports are tabled is important. But as I have just raised, there are loopholes, which I suspect the Minister for Finance, who is at the table, knows all too well, because he has used the loophole before and I suspect will use that loophole again in a way that works around the intent of these amendments. And it is disappointing that that will be the case when it occurs.

On both of these amendments, we support them in principle. We think that there are loopholes that could have been closed in a more fulsome way; however, we support the principle of the amendments as they are. I will finish by circling back to the bill in principle and say the government with this bill have claimed to improve financial transparency, but what they have done in fact is reduce financial transparency. This bill was not supported for that reason, but these amendments will be supported by the coalition today.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (15:06): As pleasant as it is to see that this bill is back in the house with amendments from the Council, we saw the Victorian Liberal Party oppose the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 that was put before this house, and based on the debate that we had I am pretty sure there was a lot of confusion and a lot of people that actually had not read the bill. There seemed to be a lot of misunderstanding about what the intention of the bill is and what the action of the bill would be. For example, the bill was largely criticised by the Liberals as removing accountability and transparency of the executive, and the Shadow Treasurer at the time took the charge in blocking the legislation.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the Speaker, just before she left, gave a ruling that speeches need to deal with the substance of the amendments, and she was very clear about

that. As much as I enjoy the precis and analysis by the member of what I said multiple months ago – perhaps we can have a chat about it outside the chamber – it is not in line with the Speaker’s ruling.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I will remind the member to come back to the amendments.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you, Acting Speaker; I will try and make your job as easy as possible. However, I think it is worth going into the substance of the bill, and what was decided in the upper house of course is why we are here today. But for those members on the other side that think their discussions, their debates, had no material impact on what happened to this bill when it went through Parliament and why it actually needed to get amended, that is shying away from reality and shying away from their responsibility.

One of the examples we heard was about the use of warrants. For the past 16 years, whether you are Liberal or Labor or whether you are part of various inquiries, that has been something that has been brought up time and time again.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member spoke earlier about the fact that he claimed to have read the bill. Warrants are not part of the amendments that are before the house. It is a matter entirely separate to the debate that is underway. I would ask if you would remind the member to come back to the amendments for a second time.

Paul EDBROOKE: On the point of order, I am totally entitled to give some background behind the substantive argument about these amendments and some context to these amendments, and I believe I am doing that, Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): On the point of order – having not heard the ruling before, though – I would just remind the member that this is not debating the amendments. So if you can tie it to the amendments, that would be appreciated.

Paul EDBROOKE: I appreciate your guidance and also the guidance of the Shadow Treasurer as well. I guess you have got to understand, though, that when people misunderstand what is before the house, it goes to their voting patterns and it affects how these different bills go into legislation. What we have seen is, I believe, a misunderstanding of and at some times an uneducated view of this bill.

What has come back from the Council is great. It is good to have a bipartisan view on this bill, and this bill will go into law. It will become something that benefits our community. At the same time, I think it is reckless of those on the other side to suggest that not supporting this bill, for whatever reason they could not substantiate, is something that should be done in this house. People should be reading bills. They should be educating themselves on this. Certainly what I would like to see in this debate in regard to the amendments that have come from the upper house are people that have read the amendments and people that understand what those amendments will do – what effect the amendments will have on this bill and therefore on our community. I think that is really important. What we saw in the original debate on this bill was a ridiculous charade of people that got up on speaking points that made no sense, and we want to see that on these amendments –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this will be the third time the member has had to be counselled on coming back to the amendments. This is not a discussion about an original debate that occurred several months ago. This is a discussion about the amendments that are before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I will remind the member to come back.

Paul EDBROOKE: I do not want to make life too tough for you, Acting Speaker, so I will ensure that my debate is wound up pretty quickly. I enjoy the fact we can have a conversation in this house – also outside the house – but these amendments go to the core of what we were talking about in the substantive debate. I commend these amendments to the house and hope this bill has a speedy passage.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:12): I would also like to make a brief contribution on the Financial Management Act 1994 and these amendments. Of course we will be supporting the amendments. They are Greens amendments that were moved and written by the Greens and brought to the other place. We are very happy that they will now become law. First up, I do want to say thank you to the government, in particular the Treasurer's office and the Minister for Finance's office, for working with the Greens and their constructive engagement on these amendments when we first had the idea about them. I know there were some inside government who did not like the amendments and were trying to kill them, but I am glad that they were not successful, and I am glad that we are seeing them come before the house today and that we will see an important integrity improvement in Victoria because of these new laws that the Greens have brought forward.

As others have said, the amendments primarily do two things. The first is that they get rid of the ridiculous dump day. Governments on both sides have a long historical practice of dumping hundreds of annual reports on the exact same day, largely to bury information from the public and avoid scrutiny. It is a really important win for democracy, for integrity and for the transparency of this Parliament that these amendments will end that practice. These reports are not just dry admin. They are reports that contain a lot of really important information – reports from government agencies and departments that contain things like how our health services are operating, ambulance ramping data, data about police misconduct, data about how money is being spent, whether big projects are running to their budgets or not, important data about our environment and much, much more. There are literally hundreds of them. Often governments have wanted to keep this information quite inaccessible, keep it secret if they can and keep it hidden.

It is important for good governments to be transparent with the public, because if this information can be made transparent, then we can look at it and we can figure out how to genuinely improve things. If our hospital services are not performing the way the public expects or the way the government expects, that information needs to be out there so that we can genuinely have a conversation about how to improve it. I know our politics these days have become a bit of a servant to the 24-hour news cycle. It has some unintended consequences where governments are now feeling like they do not have the time to address big, tricky issues that come before them before they are just splashed on the front page of the paper as a scandal. I have some sympathy for governments around that and around how difficult it is to govern in these times, but that is not an excuse to have a reaction which is just to hide the information. That is not how we need to address this problem, so it is good that we will be seeing more transparency and integrity reforms because of these bills. The amendments will see that the reports will have deadlines on when they need to be tabled in Parliament and when they need to be made public, and it will not be up to ministers or the government to dictate when that happens so they can all happen on the same day. That is good for the Victorian public.

The other set of amendments deals with the issue of Treasurer's advances, where the Treasurer has been able to spend money in quite a secretive manner. I know that has been a matter of some conjecture over the past few years in particular. These amendments will require reporting on this every six months so there is a lot more transparency around the Victorian budget and how money is being spent. They are commonsense and important integrity reforms, and we are very proud that the Greens have brought them before the Parliament and that today we will see them become law.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (15:15): I also rise to speak on the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and particularly the amendments made by the Council. I think I missed the opportunity to speak on the substantive bill, which is a little bit of a shame. I just want to reference some of the initial statements made by the member for Brighton in asking why these amendments were not discussed yesterday. I thought that was actually quite rude to the minister at the table, the Minister for Finance. As the minister himself said –

James Newbury interjected.

Paul HAMER: He was not in the state, because he was attending to government business. He was not gallivanting on some holiday, and I think it is only appropriate that the amendments be dealt with now the minister has returned to Parliament and has been able to present them. There has been a lot of work which has been done through the minister and through the minister's office and the Treasurer's office, and it was only right and proper that he had the opportunity to present the amendments to the house, and I thank him for it.

In terms of the amendments that are sought to be passed today, if we look back at the context of the bill and what we are trying to achieve through the amendment bill, it is about the reporting obligations of public sector agencies and clearer requirements for financial disclosures, performance reporting and risk management, making it easier for the Parliament, the public and oversight bodies to scrutinise how these funds are used. I think the changes that were canvassed and proposed in the other house and were accepted by the government are complementary to these and, as other speakers have said, further strengthen the legislation in this regard. There is a large number of reports and there is a very significant number of government agencies and government departments, and they are spending large sums of taxpayer money. It is important that the annual reports and other financial statements of these agencies are reported – as they always are and as they always should be – and if there are processes for them to be put in within clearer timeframes and to make sure that those timeframes are clearer for Parliament, for the public and for members of the community to consider them, then that is an important step forward. I will keep my contribution brief, but I think the amendments that have been proposed and accepted by the Council really go to the heart of what we were trying to achieve with the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill in the first place, and I commend the amendments to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:19): I rise also to speak on the amendments passed in the other place in relation to the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I think some members on the other side will be happy that I actually have read the amendments, so I will be able to speak to them, unlike the member for Frankston. But this is still a bad bill. Even with the amendments that we passed and supported in the other place, it is still a bad bill. These new amendments only make a bad bill a little less bad, and it really will give this tired Labor government even greater power to hide the true state of Victoria's disastrous financial situation – to hide from the reporting and the transparency that every Victorian deserves, particularly when we have the state of the budget and the state of the finances skyrocketing to nearly \$200 billion of debt and Victorian taxpayers funding \$1.2 million an hour of interest repayments alone.

This is a bill that seeks to destroy accountability and transparency, as I said, and to remove the ordinary transparency that has been occurring year after year, election cycle after election cycle, of Labor governments and Liberal governments. It has been happening for a long, long time, and all of a sudden this government wants to strip Victorians of that transparency just before the next state election – surprise, surprise. It removes the requirement for this government to report on what Victoria's finances look like before Victorians are due to make an extremely important decision at the next state election. Every other government before this – as I said, Liberal and Labor – has had to disclose the true state of Victoria's finances and the financial position in the lead-up to an election. But this Labor government, which has become obsessed with control, spin, deceit and secrecy, will deny disclosing this very valuable and important information to Victorians just before an election. It is an utter disgrace. As the Shadow Treasurer mentioned –

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a debate around the amendments that are coming from the upper house, and we are straying well beyond that at the moment.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): On the point of order, I think the Manager of Opposition Business is linking things to the amendments that are before the house, but I ask her to come back to the amendments.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Bridget VALLENCE: A bit loose? The member for Frankston did not even refer to the amendments for one second in his contribution, and *Hansard* will reflect that. As I said, and I will repeat: this government has become obsessed with control, deceit, secrecy and a lack of transparency, and it will absolutely deny disclosing that extremely important information for Victorians just before the election. It is an absolute disgrace. That is the sneaky piece that they inserted in this legislation, and that is what they have been able to get through the upper house with these amendments in a deal with the Greens so that they can avoid that extremely important level of transparency – throw it out the window so Victorians do not get to see the true state of the budget before the election. It was because they could get that deal and those amendments up in the upper house that Victorians will be denied the opportunity to know the true state of the budget.

These amendments before us will go only some way to restoring an extra little bit of responsible financial management. What these amendments are seeking to achieve is to have a little bit of extra transparency, particularly around the Treasurer's advance and how it is used and how it is spent, and that is absolutely long overdue. The Treasurer's advance has been an important mechanism, but it should be used only in a narrowcast way. Under this tired Labor government, however, the Treasurer's advance has been completely and utterly abused to the point where it has become an absolute slush fund, just as the Shadow Treasurer has said, to fund Labor's pet projects and schemes, and it has been hidden from the budget papers. The Treasurer's advance has been hidden from the budget papers.

The Treasurer's advance has always and traditionally been intended to be used to access funds in times of emergencies, for example, a natural disaster like the severe and devastating storms that hit the Yarra Ranges in my community. But under this corrupt government, under Labor, it has been used like a credit fund, like a slush fund, to pay for this government's political projects. It was revealed late last year just before the former Treasurer Tim Pallas resigned that Victoria had drawn \$10 billion from the Treasurer's advance to cover hospital spending, infrastructure work and, worst of all, the settlement of the Commonwealth Games fiasco. These funds are never disclosed in the budget papers and only revealed a year after they are actually spent. I think many in this chamber will remember at the last budget when the health budget was cut by a billion dollars by this Labor government. Hospitals were facing the prospect of being forced to close and cancel surgeries. This Labor government had decimated the health budget.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, as has been articulated many, many times before in this debate, this is a very narrow debate about what has come back from the upper house, and I ask you to draw the member back to that.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Manager of Opposition Business, I remind you to come back to the amendments.

Bridget VALLENCE: The Treasurer's advance is expressly one of the amendments that we are discussing today. It is precisely why it is so important to remind the house how this Labor government has been using the Treasurer's advance so dismally, with such a lack of transparency, which is precisely why this amendment has been brought forward that we support.

The health budget was cut by a billion dollars by this Labor government, and as I said, hospitals were facing forced closure and cancelling vital surgeries for everyday Victorians. But after the political pressure got too much, this Labor government raided the Treasurer's advance to the tune of \$1.45 billion just to keep hospitals from being shut down. We then saw that \$1.36 billion was ripped out of the Treasurer's advance to spend on the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), this project that very few Victorians want. It is not going to assist anyone in my local community. It is so bad that the federal Labor government is no longer committing any further funding to this project, and there is a business case that is not really thorough or has no rigour around it. But we now hear that this Labor government plans to hit property owners with a new tax to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop, and that is after they raided the Treasurer's advance in order to pay for it. This is why we need more transparency.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the speaker on her feet might say it is relevant for the last word that she said, but the previous 2½ minutes were not relevant. This is not a budget take-note speech. It is a response to the changes from the upper house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): There is no point of order.

Bridget VALLENCE: This SRL project is haemorrhaging money for the state and sucking vital funds from essential services that Victorians rely on. The Labor government cannot get anything more from the Commonwealth government. They are going to have to tax Victorians more, and that is why they had to use the Treasurer's advance. It is precisely why we want more transparency from the Treasurer's advance.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, once again, you have counselled the member several times now to say that she has got to be brought to being relevant to the debate that is at hand. I am not clear, other than the last few words that the member says at any point in time, that it is actually relevant to the debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I ask the Manager of Opposition Business to come back to the amendments, please.

Bridget VALLENCE: We have also discovered that the Treasurer's advance, which is exactly what this amendment goes to, was used by this Labor government to fund wages of public servants working at the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions to the tune of \$15 million because they are running out of money.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:29): Sometimes I think the opposition are just opposing for the sake of opposing. I mean, the substance of their arguments and rebuttals is pretty thin. Particularly on this bill, they have really distorted a lot of the aspects of the bill, to say the least, if we want to speak to the actual amendments that have been made. I know there was some considered engagement with the crossbench and certainly the Greens political party, and we thank them for those productive elements. I note that the member for Brighton could have put forward amendments but left it to the Greens, so fair enough. That is what it is – no need for moaning after the fact.

The first amendment adds a requirement for the midyear financial report to include reporting on Treasurer's advances approved in the first half of the financial year. This aligns with the bill's intent to improve financial reporting and with the Treasurer's stated desire to increase transparency over the use of the Treasurer's advances. I am speaking to these amendments, because that is certainly my understanding of the way such bills are to be debated when they return to the lower house. The second amendment requires annual reports to be transmitted to the Parliament between 15 October and the earlier of four sitting days after the relevant minister receives the report – 14 calendar days or 31 October. This will result in annual reports being transmitted to the Parliament earlier than current arrangements and in a timely fashion.

They are sensible amendments that contribute to the intention of the bill, unlike the criticism from those opposite, which is simply counterproductive and a reckless position to take – irresponsible. Those opposite are continuing to sort of peddle in the Dark Ages and stop progress with their opposition to this bill, while the government takes action to strengthen – and that is what I find so galling – accountability for the state and transparency. I do not know why they are faffing about with it. Their arguments, as I say, are spurious to say the least. It does not reflect well. But in any case, we have got it here, we have got the amendments. I commend this bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:32): It has taken some time for me to get to my feet to be able to make a contribution to the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. It is a little bit hard to understand how important the government thinks this matter is. I know it repeals quite a large chunk of legislation, but it was introduced on 2 April, some four months ago, and it clearly has not been urgent for the government. The bill does a number of things. It repeals the wage theft offences and related provisions. It changes the name of the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and confers new functions on that inspectorate – it changes the titles and makes some transitional provisions.

I just want to give a little bit of history, though, of why parts of the Wage Theft Act 2020 are being repealed. In 2020 the government introduced the Wage Theft Act, and this was around deliberately and dishonestly withholding wages and superannuation. I think everybody in this house would agree that if you have done the work you should be appropriately paid for it. Whether it is in your job or whether that is casually or for a short-term contract, you should receive the moneys that you have earned, and people generally think that is a good thing. But the government actually say one thing and do the other.

Earlier this year, in March 2025, it was reported in the *Age* that junior doctors in fact won a landmark \$175 million settlement with the Victorian government, who did not quite get the wage thing right. It is easy for them to talk it up, but they actually underpaid overtime for doctors working at public hospitals. That \$175 million agreement will benefit up to 15,000 staff working across 36 Victorian health services for a decade, pretty well – from January 2015 to now. They did not log unscheduled overtime because they were unaware of their entitlements or feared it would negatively affect their career. So despite the government introducing the Wage Theft Act in 2020, they continued to flout these laws and not make sure that people knew exactly what they were entitled to.

Not so long ago the Commonwealth took over the powers, so the government here needed to know what to do. The Commonwealth – and I quite like this, a nice little bit of spin from the Commonwealth government, calling it the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No. 2) Act 2024 – through that act dealt with the fair work legislation, and essentially the functions of the Wage Theft Act have been rolled into the federal legislation. As I have said, the purpose of the bill here essentially is to repeal the wage theft offences and their related functions. That is why it is here; that is the main reason. But there are a number of other elements of the bill, including those around the Wilson review and also renaming the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and, as I said, conferring those new functions.

I just want to raise an issue and bring to the house's attention a matter with the Wage Inspectorate Victoria experienced in my electorate. It was an absolutely very poor piece of work by the inspectorate itself. One of the hospitality businesses in the town had employed a number of younger people whose parents had actually asked them if they had a job for them, and they did have a job. They thought that people who were 14 years and nine months could work in that business. And they heard something on the radio and thought, 'Gee, maybe it's actually 15 years.' So they rang the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to say, 'What's the standing here? Are we correct or are we incorrect? And if we're incorrect, we'd better fix it.' So they argy-bargied on it for a little bit and then looked at all of the employment records and then charged them with 101 criminal offences relating to employing children. Those 101 offences were the number of shifts worked collectively between those three people that they had worked without the proper permits and a couple of other things.

They self-reported this and it went to court, and each of these charges was 100 penalty points, \$18,000, each. There were 101. This was going to absolutely bankrupt a perfectly legitimate business who had

thought they were doing everything right and who had gone for clarification. They were thrown through the wringer. I know the couple who were involved – I know them quite well – and saw how devastated they were. It went to court and it essentially got thrown out, because it was ridiculous given that they had self-reported and they had not intentionally done this at all. They fessed up. They said, ‘Yes, we had done it, but we didn’t know we were doing the wrong thing. We rang to clarify whether we were.’ They had that early plea and they were of exceptional character, so there was no conviction and they were ordered to pay \$2000 to the court fund. And from the stories that I have heard from the couple about what happened in the court, the Wage Inspectorate Victoria got a big smack over the knuckles, a big rap over the knuckles, for how they handled that. And then the following summer the wage inspectorate went down probably to your electorate, Acting Speaker Marchant, and to many others on the Surf Coast, talking to all of the businesses to make sure they understood it, because it was not clearly understood. Now we are seeing that there have been changes in this area, and I would like to see any government agency behave with a lot more integrity than happened in that case.

Other parts of this bill are around the construction industry, and in the second-reading speech, right up-front, it reads:

Criminal and unlawful behaviour has no place in Victoria’s construction industry.

It has no place but it is thriving, and this government has let it thrive. We have heard the stories of the rorts, of the ghost shifts and of people snoozing on the job but still getting paid. Victorians deserve to know the extent of what is happening here and the extent to which bikies and organised criminals have infiltrated major projects and how this was allowed to occur. Who is responsible? How much has it cost taxpayers?

Not only have we had those sorts of rorts, but women on construction sites have been subjected to bullying, harassment and rape threats and have received payouts. The treatment of women on these construction sites – government-funded build sites in fact – with the CFMEU was appalling. We had three cases that were outlined, by the *Age* again – Nick McKenzie, Sarah Danckert and Amelia Ballinger – in March this year: a bikie-linked CFMEU health and safety rep, on a rail level crossing removal, during his lunchbreak bashed a woman; somebody else was locked in a room while the bloke who detained her smoked ice; and there was a video image of a bloke absolutely kicking a woman and punching her. What concerns me greatly is that this government talk a big game on protecting women. Well, you have absolutely let them down with that thuggish union that you all rely on so heavily. Men with violent histories are pushed onto worksites and are punishing women if they complain about their behaviour. Importantly, the Premier of the day was the minister in charge at that time. It is absolutely appalling. So the blowouts, the corruption and the crimes against women fit fairly and squarely with her.

As a result, the Wilson review was undertaken and this was to have a look at some of these sorts of actions and activities. Whilst seven recommendations have been made, today we are dealing with only two of them. We understand that the other recommendations will be dealt with in further legislation down the line. We are not exactly sure when. This is such an important issue, and this behaviour is horrific and abhorrent and should not be tolerated. The government say they do not tolerate it, but we are still seeing these sorts of things reported, and it is just not good enough. With the Wilson review particularly, we are looking at strengthening the powers of the Victorian government bodies that are engaged with or have oversight of construction companies or construction unions to respond to allegations of criminal or other unlawful conduct in the Victorian construction sector. This is the sort of thing that they were looking at, the consideration of recommendations about what should be done. We have got one here about a clearing house where they have not actually got teeth but they are taking complaints and dishing them out to make sure that the right bodies deal with them. They should be doing more.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (15:42): I am delighted to rise today to make a contribution on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. This is an important bill and one that has relevance to many of my

constituents and my community. First, the objective of the bill is to give effect to the government's commitment to repeal Victoria's wage theft law in light of the commencement of the Commonwealth national law. With the Wage Inspectorate Victoria no longer responsible for the investigation and enforcement of Victoria's wage theft offences, it is no longer appropriate for it to continue to be named the wage inspectorate and it will instead be renamed Workforce Inspectorate Victoria (WIV), also known as the workforce inspectorate, to reflect the broader regulatory responsibility.

Acting Speaker Marchant, I am so proud, just like you, to be a member of a government that is committed to workers rights and one that has delivered some really historic pieces of legislation to better protect the rights of workers and working people in Victoria, and criminalising wage theft is just one important example of that. I was proud to stand here in this chamber to join the debate on criminalising wage theft and to establish the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to investigate and to prosecute wage theft offences, which was several years ago now. Allow me to say, I was extremely proud also to stand on behalf of the many vulnerable workers in my electorate – the hospitality workers, the agricultural workers and the migrant workers – that have suffered from high levels of wage theft and to make wage theft a criminal offence. In saying that, I would like to also take up the points in your contribution, Acting Speaker. It is about making sure that every worker gets the right amount of pay, so it is fair for all, and it is also helping those who want to do the right thing, especially the employer and the contractor, to do the right thing and their fair share.

Wage theft was a constant struggle for many of my constituents, especially those working in agriculture, overseas students and those on working holiday visas. Those changes were a real milestone and testament to all of those fighting against wage theft. I have spoken many times here in this place about how each and every morning you will find streams of people movers, minibuses and mini-vans transporting agricultural farm workers to farms in the outer suburbs from my electorate in the south-east. If you go down to Springvale South early in the morning, it is quite a spectacle to see. Again, it is all about fairness, it is all about the right pay.

Not many years ago, after I arrived in Australia in 1996 – I have said this in the chamber before and I would like to say it again – I travelled on those minibuses during high school holidays or uni breaks to work on a farm during that time. I would be in that minibus first thing in the morning, down to a strawberry farm on the Mornington Peninsula. I appreciated the opportunity to work during that time, to earn some savings during holiday time. There was never any bargaining power or questions about the hourly rate. I was more than happy to be picked up by that mini-van in the morning. Many of my friends did the same thing. By the end of the school holidays we had a couple of thousand dollars to buy our books and pay for our train tickets and the like. We never knew that there was such a thing as wage theft because as youngsters we did not care.

But now we understand that there are things that need to be done. I was very proud to stand in this chamber back in 2020 when the wage theft laws were introduced. I also would like to commend the efforts of the National Union of Workers, now the United Workers Union, for grinding away and organising many of the farm workers that live in my electorate and helping them to raise their voice and to raise issues of unemployment, to report instances of wage theft and, importantly, to collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions. I really commend and thank the United Workers Union for that great work. It has changed working people's lives for the better and made a significant difference to the lives of many people living in my electorate, so thank you to all those involved.

I am really proud to rise today in different circumstances but still to make a contribution and to celebrate the important changes that have come from Victoria's wage theft legislation. I am very proud that Victoria led the way and was the first state to introduce criminal offences targeting the deliberate, dishonest underpayment of wages. Again, I listened to the contributions of many speakers on this side of the house before me. It is all about making sure there is a fair share for all. We were the only jurisdiction to establish an independent body with a strong investigative power to enforce those criminal laws, the Wage Inspectorate Victoria. Since then we have seen positive change with the Commonwealth criminal offences which cover the field with respect to the enforcement of wage

underpayments and other entitlements. I am very proud to be here and to participate in this national change. We now have the ability to repeal all Victoria's offences to avoid uncertainty for the community, businesses and workers, given that national carriage. Those are now historic national changes, a testament to all of the workers that have raised their voice and pushed back against years of exploitation and underpayment.

In the remaining time, I would just like to touch briefly on the second objective of the bill, which is to acquit recommendation 1 of the Wilson review into the Victorian government body's engagement with construction companies and construction unions by conferring a complaint referral function to the workforce inspectorate to allow it to receive and refer complaints from any person relating to public construction. This is an important and welcome change. The government has committed to supporting all recommendations of the Wilson review, either in principle or in full. Providing the workforce inspectorate with a function to receive and refer complaints related to public construction will expedite the implementation of recommendation 1, as it will be quicker to set up the function within an existing regulator rather than establish a standalone body. Further policy work is underway to address the remainder of the Wilson recommendations, including implementing requirements in construction policies and contracts to require principal contractors on government-funded construction sites to report criminal or other unlawful conduct to the WIV and strengthening the Labour Hire Authority's regulatory power. I look forward to the outcome of that work. I commend the former Attorney-General, in her role as Minister for Industrial Relations, for bringing this forward and for continuing to deliver important changes to hardworking Victorians.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:52): I rise to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. It was back on 1 January 1997 that the Victorian government referred its industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth under the Commonwealth Powers (Industrial Relations) Act 1996. That was quite a landmark decision at the time. The state government of the day, the Kennett government, made the decision that there was no need to have a dual system of industrial relations regulation in this state, that there were sufficient protections and that, in fact, there were some real advantages for Victorian businesses and for Victorian employees to operate under a unified national system of industrial relations law. For that reason, the Victorian government effectively gave up its right to legislate in this space, with the referral of its powers to the Commonwealth Parliament.

It has always been something I have found a little bit peculiar, particularly as somebody who did practise some industrial relations law in my previous life. If this government is so keen to legislate in the field of IR, why doesn't the government take the powers back? If the government is so keen to legislate in areas of industrial relations and if it wants to establish its own workplace bureaucracies and put taxpayers through all this horrible expense, why doesn't the government do what it really wants to do?

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: I can tell what the member for Point Cook really wants to do, and I can see what the advisers in the advisers box want to do – they want to take those powers back. Why don't they just do it, instead of going through this stupid charade of pretending to legislate in industrial relations areas where the government has got no power to do so. We know what happened when the government tried to use these wage theft laws, which they are now repealing in this bill. The government tried to use these wage theft laws and took a business to court – a business called Macedon Lodge – and there were 94 criminal charges against this regional restaurant for what the government described as wage theft. The business, like most people involved in the industry, thought that the government's wage theft laws were unconstitutional. So a little matter which was originally set down for the Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court wound up going to the High Court of Australia, because the person who was charged and the business that was charged under these wage theft laws wanted to test whether they were in fact legitimate or not – whether they were in fact valid laws or not.

The Victorian solicitor-general at the time was Rowena Orr, who is now a respected judge of the Court of Appeal. I saw the submissions that Ms Orr filed on behalf of the state of Victoria and the Victorian Attorney-General claiming that these laws were valid – notwithstanding section 109 of the constitution that makes really clear that where Commonwealth and state laws conflict the Commonwealth laws prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.

When push came to shove, do you know what this brave government did – this brave government that initiated these 94 charges for wage theft? The government withdrew every single one of those charges. It walked away from them. Do you know why? Because this government knew it was cooked – it was absolutely cooked. Rather than face the embarrassment of having the High Court of Australia strike down their laws as unconstitutional, the government wimped it; the government turned tail and ran and withdrew the charges to be able to say to the High Court that there is no ongoing dispute because all the charges have been withdrawn. That shows you the courage of this government's convictions. When it comes to trying to protect workers from wage theft, they would rather save their own skins and try and hide their own embarrassment from having their laws struck down as unconstitutional than defending the rights of workers. For all the cant we hear from members opposite, we know that when push comes to shove, they are far more interested in protecting their own reputations than they are in actually protecting workers rights. With those 94 charges withdrawn, the whole case collapsed. Now we see the denouement; we see those laws being abolished in this bill.

As my colleague the member for Eildon pointed out, if the government wants to crack down on nasty employers who practise wage theft, they can start by looking in the mirror. The member for Eildon referred to the article in the *Age* from 14 March this year: 'Doctors win \$175 million in overtime claim'. Our doctors are some of the most hardworking people in our public sector. Our doctors do God's work. They often work incredibly long hours in incredibly trying circumstances. I put on record my thanks not just to our doctors but to our nurses and to all our medical staff for all the work that they do.

As the Good Book says, 'The labourer is worthy of their hire.' Why does this government think that it can get away with underpaying junior doctors and not paying their overtime properly? What happened in the end is that up to 15,000 staff who worked across 36 Victorian health services between January 2015 and March 2025 were going to benefit from being paid the money they were ripped off by this government. I note that entire 10-year period covers the entire Labor government's period. This is a government that ripped off junior doctors to the tune of \$175 million. Why wasn't the Minister for Health brought up on wage theft charges? Does wage theft only apply in the private sector? Apparently health ministers can rip off junior doctors as much as they like, and that is okay. But if you are a restaurant in Macedon, you get 94 criminal charges, until it is inconvenient for the government to have them proceed, and then they get withdrawn as well.

It is not the first time that the High Court has given this government a black eye. We all remember the former Treasurer Mr Pallas, who very cleverly thought that he was going to be able to impose a tax on electric vehicles, notwithstanding all the advice that anybody who had ever read a constitution would have given him that in fact if you try and charge a tax on something based on distance travelled that is an excise. Any law student will know that an excise can only be levied by the Commonwealth Parliament, not by a state. Sure enough, the government implemented this regime of the EV tax, put this new tax in place and charged a whole lot of Victorians who had electric vehicles this new tax – only, and inevitably, to have it struck down by the High Court as unconstitutional. This government has got form when it comes to making political statements, putting them into law and then getting a reality check by the High Court. They have done it with wage theft laws, they have done it with electric vehicle taxes, and I do wonder what is going to happen with the government's recent pronouncement about working from home. I do wonder what constitutional head of power the government intends to rely upon to once again wade into the industrial relations field, which the government has clearly given to the Commonwealth, but I do not think this government cares about the detail. I think they care more

about generating a headline and being seen to try to do the right thing, regardless of whether it is legal or not and regardless of whether it is constitutional or not.

This bill is actually a very sad sight in a way, because I think the government spent over \$30 million on this Wage Inspectorate Victoria, which I think has recovered somewhere around maybe \$2 million or something like that; it certainly has not been a very good investment in terms of taxpayers. It has undertaken work which was unconstitutional, and the government is now having to admit that with the repeal of the wage theft laws. It is not as though this government is doing so well on its basic functions that it can afford to be getting into new areas of activity and getting involved there. We certainly do not oppose the bill, but this bill is a very sad indictment of a government where, once again, its ambition exceeds its abilities.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (16:02): It was in 2017, when I was the secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union and also a very proud member of the Victorian Trades Hall Council executive, when I first heard the official term ‘wage theft’. Trades Hall had launched its campaign to criminalise wage theft, and I remember at the time reflecting on a job which I had when I was younger. It was my first job, in my teen years, being 14. I was working in a family-run fast-food business that was close to my home. I could walk there after school. I was absolutely tickled pink that I was employed, that I could help mum out financially with the bills and that I had my own authority. I was rapt, over the moon, to have a job. My boss paid me a whopping \$7 cash per hour, and I thought that was great. Thankfully, though, my brother worked at Bunnings and he was on an enterprise agreement on the award wage. I very quickly learned that \$7 cash an hour was not that much. I sought help, and I ended up joining a union. They tried to help me, but unfortunately, being a casual, it just meant one thing: I stopped getting shifts. I very quickly learned at that time that there was not a great deal we could do.

It was that one example of being a vulnerable young person that actually made me realise how important eradicating wage theft is and how often young people get taken advantage of. Then we were in 2017, and I was reflecting back on those times when I was 14 years old being taken advantage of. Whilst sitting in that executive room at the Trades Hall executive I agreed with the secretary Luke Hilakari that we needed to do something, as did the entire executive. At the end of the day the only people who benefit from wage theft are the employers and the big bosses, and that is completely unacceptable. I am very proud that the Labor Party, our party, not only here in Victoria but also nationwide, is committed to utterly eradicating wage theft and to stopping ripping people off, because that is what it is – it is ripping people off. It is paying them unjustly to make sure that they end up with extra money in their pockets. The relationship between bosses and workers is basically, unfortunately, often one to exploit the worker by the boss, and that is the root of the problem, but every worker should be entitled to a fair day’s pay which they and their family can live on.

This is what the labour movement has always fought for proudly; it should be the bare minimum. Wage theft is completely unacceptable, and bosses who steal – and I will say that, who steal – from workers’ wages or who pay them below the award or minimum wage are absolutely disgraceful and should be charged appropriately. I know some previous speakers have talked about a misunderstanding or the fact that innocent bosses did not realise they were doing the wrong thing so therefore put themselves forward and said, ‘Have we done the wrong thing?’ Well, you had done the wrong thing, you had not paid your employees properly and therefore you should be prosecuted. For so many working people, the wage that they are entitled to earn makes up the difference between being able to afford the groceries, being able to afford rent, being able to afford the mortgage and being able to send their kids to school. Wage theft is not okay; it is, as I said before, unacceptable. Any boss who does it does not deserve to be in business, yet for so many predatory employers in Victoria wage theft has simply become the business model. ‘How can they get away with it?’ is too often the question – again, unacceptable. It is why the Andrews Labor government legislated the Wage Theft Act 2020, which has made wage theft a criminal offence in our state. Wage theft, as we all know, is punishable by up to \$1 million in fines for companies or up to 10 years jail or \$200,000 for individuals. It is why the Andrews government founded the Wage Inspectorate Victoria four years ago, and it is why the

Albanese government has followed Victoria's precedent and legislated to criminalise wage theft across Australia. That is why from today Victoria is passing the baton to the Commonwealth to guard against wage theft.

This bill repeals Victoria's wage theft offences and associated record-keeping offences in line with the Commonwealth introducing similar offences intended to cover the field and which make our offences inoperative. Victoria's Wage Theft Act was the first of its kind in Australia, introducing criminal penalties for wage theft – the deliberate and dishonest underpayment of wages. It influenced a federal commitment in the space, and so the Albanese Labor government amended the Fair Work Act 2009 through the Closing Loopholes legislation to introduce federal wage theft offences following Victoria's lead. The Victorian Labor government announced its intention to repeal Victoria's wage theft laws on 14 December 2023, following passage of the Commonwealth bill. The commencement of the Commonwealth offences on 1 January this year has meant that Victoria's offences are largely inoperable. There was no opposition from unions or industry.

Victoria's wage theft laws were investigated and enforced by the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, an independent statutory authority established under section 19 of the act. The bill retains the inspectorate as an independent statutory body with ongoing responsibility for administering Victoria's child employment, long service leave and owner-driver forestry contractor laws. However, the repeal of wage theft offences means that its name no longer aligns with its regulatory responsibilities, and it will be renamed Workforce Inspectorate Victoria along with a new name for the act: Workforce Inspectorate Victoria Act 2020. In July 2024 the Victorian government commissioned the Wilson review. The final report was delivered to government on 29 November last year. The report contained eight recommendations about how the powers of Victorian government bodies can be strengthened to better respond to allegations of criminal and other unlawful behaviours. The recommendations emphasise collective action among employers, agencies and law enforcement to encourage complaints, share information and act on misconduct, as well as highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach involving cultural, regulatory, legal, policy and contractual changes.

The Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025 will amend the Wage Theft Act 2020. As I said, it will firstly repeal Victoria's wage theft offences as well as functions and powers connected to the investigation and enforcement of those offences. It will rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria as well as rename the act to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria Act. It will retain the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria as an independent statutory body with ongoing responsibility for the regulation of child employment, long service leave and owner-driver forestry contractors and as a sector regulator under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. It will provide a facilitative function for the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to give advice and information, and it will confer a function on the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to receive and refer complaints relating to unlawful conduct on Victorian government-funded construction projects.

The bill includes provision for the workforce inspectorate to advise and report to the minister as appropriate on the complaints or matters that it receives or refers. This will allow it to identify trends and emerging issues and provide an evidence base for future reforms if required. The bill will additionally confer a general function on the workforce inspectorate to provide information, education and advice in relation to workplace entitlements if prescribed in regulations. This will allow the workforce inspectorate to provide advice and information on all workplace matters more broadly. The proposed amendment is a facilitative function intended to provide flexibility for the workforce inspectorate in the future to provide a broader advice function if deemed appropriate, without acting beyond its statutory remit.

I would like to give a shout-out to the mighty Victorian trade union movement and to Trades Hall Council for their tireless campaigning over many years to criminalise wage theft. It was in 2017, when I was at the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, that Luke Hilakari, to his credit, raised this, at that time a foreign concept. These days it is not. I am really proud that so many young people, who are often vulnerable, know what wage theft is and will not stand for it in their workplace. Thanks to Trades Hall

and to the union movement, so many young people are protected and more people are speaking about wage theft. So much of the movement's work here in Victoria has also been made nationwide reform, and that is thanks to the Albanese government.

To all the rank and file of the Victorian labour movement, I can confidently say that this Labor government's works and reforms simply would not have happened without your advocacy and your hard work. Eradicating wage theft is still very far from mission accomplished. It is something that we are going to need to continue to work on. Employers need to know that they are being watched and that they cannot continue to have wage theft in their companies.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (16:12): I rise to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. We will not be opposing this bill. But the first point I want to take the opportunity to make is that it is sensible, isn't it, that if the Commonwealth government has constitutional jurisdiction to regulate matters of workplace relations, it would be fitting and proper for a state government to defer to that? It is appropriate in our view that because the federal government has intervened in this space and covered the field, as the constitutional term is known, this state government should recognise that it should not maintain a duplicate system. Isn't that a sound principle? If a government says it is committed to reducing red tape and unnecessary compliance, it would be fitting and appropriate if this state government hewed to that principle in the future and did not create two workplace relations systems, because as we know, beginning with the Kennett government and succeeded by the Bracks, Brumby, Baillieu, Napthine, Andrews and now Allan governments, Victoria deferred its system to the Commonwealth, and that was to provide for greater simplicity for workplaces.

I wanted to make that point at the outset, but I want to address a broader point, because I have heard members on the other side of the house talk about their commitment to workers as if they are the only ones who care. Let me go through the record. I do not doubt the motives of those on the other side. On this side of the house there are those of us who have spent much of our lives working as employees. We have brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters who work as employees. Of course we all want people to work in workplaces that are safe, workplaces that see healthy wages and wages that grow over time. But what does the record say about the performance of those opposite when it comes to looking after workers? What does it actually say?

I begin with the Wilson review, which came as a panicked reaction by the Allan Labor government to disturbing allegations of corruption, blackmail, violence and intimidation in the construction sector at the hands of an unmitigated and untrammelled CFMEU, which to this day continues to operate largely without inhibitions. And what did this government do in the face of those allegations to protect workers? Well, it failed them. It failed workers. It failed workers, because the review by Mr Greg Wilson, who personally I respect, was a whitewash. It was not a serious review into reforming the construction sector. There was no investigation of criminal activity. Indeed that was explicitly excluded from the review. The review excluded hearings; witnesses could not attend and tell their story, speak their truth, in the face of all the intimidation which we all know happened and continues to happen. We know that there was a suicide on at least one occasion caused by disreputable conduct by the CFMEU. We know that legitimate firms, including Indigenous firms, were booted off taxpayer-funded projects because the CFMEU did not approve. So what did this government do? It commissioned a review which studiously avoided looking at the very problems that exist and expose workers to harm.

So can it be said on that basis that the government is for workers? No. It is not for workers. The government says it is for higher wages. Well, let us look at the record. After more than 10 years in office are workers better off in terms of wages growth under this government? No. Evidence? Well, you could go to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It released some figures yesterday – the wage price index and the growth in real wages in Victoria. It might interest members to know that in Victoria real wage growth is lower than the national average. Workers in this state under this government are earning less than their counterparts in New South Wales and Queensland and other states as well. The territories and smaller states struggle, but in terms of the major states we are performing poorly

compared to them. So when this government says it looks after workers – not that much. Real wage growth is slower here than in the other states certainly along the eastern seaboard.

Unemployment: there are more workers unemployed under this government than anywhere else in the country. Today the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the July figures, and they show that despite a fall in seasonally adjusted unemployment, Victoria's unemployment rate in similar terms remains stubbornly fixed at 4.6 per cent. The national figure went down in July to 4.2 per cent. So can it be said this government is for the workers? We have seen when it comes to violence in the CFMEU, no. When it comes to real wage growth in Victoria under this government, no. When it comes to unemployment and the number of jobless people in our great state, no. This government is not for workers, it seems, even if their hearts, like ours, are in the right place. I do not doubt their motives, but they are certainly not delivering for workers.

We have seen in its August *Statement on Monetary Policy* the Reserve Bank give us a concerning prediction that productivity will continue to slump in this country. We see a government that is not committed to boosting productivity, and productivity is the key. It might not be the most exciting word in the lexicon, but productivity is important, the member for Mordialloc might know, because if you have a higher rate of productivity, that means more jobs and lower interest rates. That is what it means – more jobs and lower interest rates. Instead we persist, because we have low rates of productivity growth, with this terrible trade-off which sees the Reserve Bank having to look at increasing interest rates when unemployment falls. We do not want that. We want both low unemployment and high jobs growth, but we are not getting that. We saw the ACTU come out with a bizarre policy – and I know many of those opposite are members of or fellow travellers with the ACTU – that says, 'We're going to boost productivity by working four days instead of five days as a standard week.' I do not know how that works out. It simply does not.

As for Prime Minister Albanese and Treasurer Jim Chalmers, I think in terms of their roundtable next week, it is a missed opportunity to include the performance of state governments in how we boost productivity in this country, because this government, the Allan Labor government, made a commitment last year in its growth statement. It said it would reduce the number of regulators as one example of boosting productivity and reducing red tape. It said it would cut the number of regulators by half by 2030. Yet almost every week we see bills come in that do not reduce red tape, do not reduce compliance, do not speak about boosting investment in our state, but add another layer of regulation to the way investment is supposed to occur in this country. If we are serious, if we want to match what clearly is a hungry outlook from the Labor Premier in South Australia, the Labor Premier in New South Wales and the new Liberal Premier in Queensland, who look at Victoria and, as some members opposite may not know, actually contact employers in this state. I was told on a number of occasions by business leaders in this state that they personally received phone calls from Premier Peter Malinauskas in South Australia, inviting them to invest in South Australia. Why? Because they see Victoria as a soft touch and as a place where it is getting harder and harder to invest.

As I said at the start, I think we are all committed to seeing workers in this state enjoy safety when they go to work and higher wages when they finish their work. We all want that for workers. But when you look at the record after more than 10 years of this Allan Labor government – when you look at the data, wages growth, unemployment, productivity, a complete absence of a real and lasting response to CFMEU violence and intimidation – the question all Victorians should be asking is: are we as workers better off? Are we doing better? Is the outlook more confident? I would say it is not, with the highest unemployment, the lowest wages growth. We need to do better in this state.

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:22): I thank the learned member for Hawthorn for his op ed on the economics and productivity discussions that are happening at the moment in Canberra. It was certainly interesting to listen to. I think when considering that this is the wage theft amendment bill on legislation that was led by Victoria in 2020, he did take us on a little bit of a reflection of what has happened since, particularly with pesky section 109 of the constitution and the history of that since that challenge

and the new federal laws. I would like to also reflect on the origins of the original legislation in 2020 as part of my contribution.

I am proud that in 2020 Victoria led our nation to criminalise wage theft. The Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison Liberal–National shambles of a federal government would never have fixed this. In fact this same government dumped wage theft penalty clauses in legislation they tried to introduce in 2021, under pressure from ultraconservatives it had to bargain with in the Senate. It is a shame. And it is fantastic to now have that partner in Canberra who also takes the issue of workers rights seriously, not just the interests of those minority groups in the Senate. I do thank the learned member for Hawthorn for his reflection. But I think in reflecting on the origin of this bill, the original legislation and the purpose of it, it was because there was a vacuum in Canberra when it came to industrial relations legislation. We had young people and other vulnerable people here in Victoria who were being exploited by employers – deliberately exploited by employers. We had to act, and that is what we did. It is fantastic to have that partner now in Canberra.

I am proud to represent one of the youngest communities in the state. So many young people in my electorate and the wider Wyndham LGA are entering the workforce for the first time. The first steps into working life usually involve doing odd jobs here and there, and something I am sure many of us in this chamber have done in our mid to late teenage years. I used to deliver papers, and I would drive delivery trucks around Melbourne when I got my truck licence, going to mansions in Toorak and Kew and places like that to deliver furniture. It was a very interesting experience for a kid from the suburbs. Legislation that was introduced recently by the federal government means that those Victorian laws, those pioneering laws, and the bodies like the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, need to be retooled to serve a broader purpose and continue to help our younger Victorians and our vulnerable Victorians when it comes to making sure that they get those rights.

In reflecting on my community and what this means for my community, in the area of Werribee we have a lot of agricultural workers, particularly from the Pacific Islands. We have seen reports throughout the years of the systematic exploitation of these workers. We have made really good steps as a state, as well as in some circumstances with action from the federal government, to make sure that these workers' rights are protected. It should not matter if you are a citizen or not: if you are one of our Pacific neighbours, you should be protected. I was honoured the other week to meet with some of those workers from our Pacific Island nations, and with some of the people who are there to support them, to talk about the issues of modern-day slavery that they are facing and issues around housing and exploitation that still exist across our agricultural sector. It is good to see a lot of our farming businesses in Werribee South taking bolder steps to try and make sure that their workers are being looked after.

I welcome the positive changes that have come from this, but I think this goes to why we continue to need to have to adapt these laws and make sure that they are meeting what they need to do. Literally not that long ago I was part of the career transitions team at the secondary school that I worked at, working with young people as they transitioned into the workforce. I had the honour to work with our school lawyer from Westjustice that we help support through our secondary schools to deliver a series of seminars for year 11 and 12s in the vocational major program all about their rights at work. A part of it was talking about this concept of wage theft. I think it is really important to reflect on this, because this is not just about those headlines that you see. It is about those everyday happenings and making sure people are prepared to stand up for their rights and that they have that support at whatever level of government, whether that is federal, state or local government. We all have a role to play when it comes to protecting workers.

We do welcome that legislation by the federal government. It really does show that Victoria was leading the way and is still leading the way when it comes to protecting these workers. Along those lines we have seen the idea of retooling Wage Inspectorate Victoria. We are renaming the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and repealing some of those wage theft offences to standardise them between our state and federal jurisdictions.

With this bill we are also adopting the recommendations of the Wilson report, because we listened to those workers and experts, and our policies will consistently reflect this. I was just looking at the date that the Wilson report was commissioned back in July last year, and I think it is pretty impressive to have such a huge amount of reform come into place in 12 months to make sure that our workplaces, particularly ones that have been funded by the state government, in some cases with the Commonwealth government – and we think it is great having a partner in Canberra for once; it was 10 years of not getting much out of a Liberal government – are protected.

The Workforce Inspectorate Victoria will receive and refer complaints related to public construction across Victoria, including from those working to deliver our Big Build projects, including some of those projects in my electorate like the Ison Road extension, the Wyndham ring-road project and the Ballan Road roundabout removal and upgrade – all really important construction jobs that we have in our community. I would like to reflect that not only do we have quite a significant number of professionals in our community who benefit from things like working from home policies and other nation-leading policies, but we also have a significant number of people in the construction industry in Wyndham that are building all of Victoria. In fact when meeting with some of our construction workers from Wyndham, I was asking, ‘Where do you have to go and work?’ And they were saying, ‘We go all the way down to Frankston. We go all the way across to North East Link to work. We’re working at Footscray Hospital.’ It is important that this bill makes sure that we have that inspectorate that is targeted towards those construction sites that we are putting state money into. We are also providing certainty for the community, businesses and workers and ensuring that correct protections and guardrails are in place for the safety and wellbeing of workers.

I want to return briefly to some of the stories that we heard through that program that we ran with Westjustice. We heard stories of students being told that Saturdays counted as normal working days. We had students being told that after a certain time of night they were just going to get paid the same amount as during the day. Although it was wrong of those employers to suggest that, to their credit at least they were open about it and we could follow it up through Westjustice to make sure that those students were getting what they were entitled to. I think it is a pretty important message for young people who may be watching Parliament – and I know there are not many, but there is certainly a delegation from Wyndham City Council who are here today to observe Parliament and watch how we do these things. For those young people who are listening in and are following this debate, it is important to remember that we have these programs in our schools, including what we do in work-related skills in the vocational major – another thing that this government has developed to support young people wanting to go into a career that is not necessarily university related. In those subjects we follow these things up and we clarify these rights that they have.

This amendment bill also helps to put in place those protections and clarifies that distinction between what the federal government laws will do and what the state needs to continue to do to add to that depth of protections for young people and vulnerable workers across our state. I think it is also important too that it sets a really clear standard to any employer that we will not accept any kind of conduct that puts people at risk of not taking home what they are entitled to. We know times are tough, but that is no reason to exploit the rights of workers. This side works closely with the unions, particularly those unions that operate in my community, like the Australian Services Union and the AMWU as well, that have been working with our council workers and keeping them safe.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:32): I rise this afternoon to contribute to the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. It is fitting this week that the government have chosen to spend an afternoon, with so many crises on, with us discussing a bill that is about repealing a bill that they have had in place since 2020. We are repealing this bill because in its nearly five years of existence it has not actually done anything. It has sat there on the books. It has got in the way of the federal government. Despite the high-and-mighty rhetoric from those opposite for the afternoon talking about the ills of employers, they have completely ignored what modern productive workplaces desire and need, which is great relationships between workers and employers. This government, as we consistently know,

refuse to accept that that is where most people are today. They love to continue this 1950s class warfare. Every time they open their mouths they get up there and they want to drill into every last poor practice.

I guess it is ironic that today with this bill we are discussing the merits of something that they never did and never were able to enact and enforce. It is ironic that we are having this conversation because during question time today we had a similar conversation. The government is left with the simple task of running the state, keeping people safe and making sure the law is adhered to, and yet for two days, for example, we have heard that the government cannot even cancel a piece of paperwork. This is a government that on one hand was able to shut down the state and bring laws to bear within a matter of hours – it could keep us all locked in our houses – but it has been completely and utterly incapable of managing a wage theft prosecution or case. More devastatingly for Victorians – for Victorian children and Victorian families – it has been two days and they have not been able to find the delete button on the computer. The simple act of just saying this person –

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the speaker on his feet seems to be straying somewhat from the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): I think the speaker was being relevant to the subject matter at hand. I do ask him to keep drawing his remarks back to the bill.

Richard RIORDAN: I am of course talking about the inability of this government to enforce its own legislation. We are now finding ourselves today having government members stand here and wax lyrical about the intent of a piece of legislation that for five years achieved nothing. They had one failed High Court attempt, and they ran scurrying away from the High Court because they could not even get that together. It is a bit like the families of Victoria today going, ‘Look, how difficult is it to press a delete button? How difficult is it for them to withdraw and hold people to account for their behaviours and their actions?’ This government just does not seem capable of it. In fact for two days we have heard that they are going to act rapidly.

I guess this wage theft amendment bill shows us how rapidly they can act. It was first brought to the Parliament quite a few months ago. It is on a piece of legislation that was brought in in 2020 and nothing happened. It just gives an opportunity for the government to, as I said earlier, play its favourite card, which is to create division and stir up animosities in workplaces when really a productive, forward-thinking, progressive government would actually be going, ‘How do we get people continuing to work together to share the benefits of good productivity and share the benefits of growing businesses and companies?’ They do not do that. In fact the only glimmer in this that would actually open up opportunities for more workers in Victoria and provide fairer workplaces is actually for them to take some note of their rather tardy report, the Wilson report, on the CFMEU’s behaviour on worksites.

For those of us that have actually had a real job, unlike many on the other side, who have just sort of wafted their way through in the back offices of Parliament for most of their working life – the member for Mordialloc. Those of us that have actually owned a pair of Blundstones that they put to work, those of us that actually know tradies, those of us that have actually lugged bags of concrete up a hill or those of us that have actually done real work would know that the workforce in Victoria is full of workers who are tired of the blind eye this government turns to the CFMEU worksite – they turn the blind eye to the person that is going about their job as a small business operator. They have got a few employees, and they want to deliver a load of gravel to a worksite, but no, they cannot do that, because they have not paid their union dues: ‘You haven’t been part of the CFMEU. You’re not paying into the coffers of the Labor Party and big unions.’ We do not hear this government ever talk about the protections for those workers. We do not hear this government talk about protections for all manner of people in small and medium enterprises that get locked out of all sorts of job opportunities and business opportunities and work opportunities in Victoria because they do not adhere to the Labor Party and the CFMEU work culture.

This bill that we are talking about today, the wage theft amendment, is a pretty hollow and shallow attempt at regulation and policy here in the state of Victoria. It is disappointing because there are big improvements this government could make that would really benefit workers. Real benefits –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: Absolutely. People can work from home. There is no issue with people working from home, But once again this government wants to regulate it. It wants to tell businesses, it wants to tell workers, ‘You’ve got to do this.’ They are incapable, because, let us face it, I do not think any of them have ever employed anybody. They have never employed anybody. In fact they have only ever been on the teat of the government payroll, so they do not actually understand where money comes from. They do not understand where productivity comes from. They do not realise where and how real workplaces operate. They really do not. They are quite clueless in fact. I mean, the poor old member for Mordialloc over there – if government did not exist, he would have never earned an income in his life. He is probably so incapable of finding a real job that he would have been down at the Centrelink office if he was not working for government.

The opportunity exists. A good government needs to empower both the workers and businesses to work collaboratively together to get the best outcomes, because, guess what, every time government sticks its beak in it, it messes up the relationship. Government needs to be there to help guide and work and assist, not to tell people what to do and not to insist and force practices that just do not work for some people. They talk about flexibility, but it is their union-based flexibility. It is not flexibility for working families, small businesses and others that really are the engine room of this state.

In conclusion, the Liberal Party and the Nationals are not going to be opposing this bill, because there is really not much to oppose in it. The basis of this bill, as we know, was that this was kicked out of the park by the High Court. It did not get anywhere in five years. God knows what bureaucracy they established and the amount of money they wasted on putting in infrastructure purely for the former Premier’s delight in creating a bit more class warfare; that has been the real basis of this government’s modus operandi, to just cause division and hate wherever they can. They did that and they set that up, and now we have got a piece of legislation to unwind it all, fold it all back up and pop it back in the box. This government’s old mate Albo is in charge now, and no doubt he is going to carefully guide workplace relations here in Victoria from his holiday house up on the east coast of New South Wales, his multimillion-dollar cliff-top lair that he lives in. He will sit up there like a good chardonnay socialist Labor PM and start directing how we are going to work in our workplaces in Victoria.

I congratulate the Labor Party. There is nothing better than a Labor Party at its best when it rules with hypocrisy. It is marvellous to see. They will get on and do that. We know for sure it is going to be a long time before we see real workplace reform and real fine-tuning around the CFMEU. It is literally billions of dollars that this government has allowed to be siphoned off through poor workplace practices and, at times, high-level and low-level corruption. And, worst of all, it has denied so many Victorians an opportunity to share in some of the infrastructure build that has occurred in this state. With that, we let that bill go through to the keeper.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:42): Well, that was indeed quite the performance. I do not even know where to begin; there is so much there that I really do wish to rebut. I will say that the member for Polwarth made a fairly spurious claim that for five years this piece of legislation did nothing. Six hundred investigations were being undertaken – not six, not 60 but 600 – so the member for Polwarth probably needs to check his facts when speaking in this place sometimes. It is very pleasing that the opposition will not be opposing this bill. That is a good start, because it is not generally their default position. I will say, too, there was quite a bit of work going on, but obviously the Commonwealth government has now stepped into this, and thank heavens for that. Do you know why that is a great thing? Because it is not just Victorians who are going to benefit from the initiative that our government brought in; the entire country will benefit from this, and workers know they will be protected from having their wages deliberately taken from them.

The whole premise of the Labor Party, which underpins us to our core, is fair pay for a fair day's work. That is such an important tenet for the labour movement the world around, and that is what this legislation embodies – or the original legislation, which we are now altering. Thank heavens we have a partner in Canberra who agreed with us, because the former lot certainly did not, and shame on them for that. I can tell you through my former experience as an industrial officer for the SDA, where we had so many members who were young people, that it was those who were not members who were more subject to exploitation. We had employers around the country trying to pay young people with pizza. I am sorry, I do not know the last time that a pizza bought me an item of clothing. It is certainly not a way to pay anyone.

There was some egregious behaviour from workplaces out there – some terrible employers. Do not get me wrong, there are many who employ well. My parents were exceptionally good employers, and I like to think I was as well. All my staff were paid at least the award rate. It is not hard to be a good employer. Be decent, be fair, have integrity and respect your workers, because they are the best asset you will ever have. Invest in them in those ways and they will repay you manifold.

Can I just say not only is it bad for workers when wage theft is involved, it is really bad for the good employers, because when you have an old dodgy cafe in a set of strip shops paying \$15 per hour cash in hand – and this is an experience I have lived, because they were in competition with me, and I was paying at the time about \$30 equivalent, with on-costs including superannuation and WorkCover premiums – you are not on an even playing field. I was doing the right, decent thing and they were not, so they could charge less for their coffee. The good employers out there want this kind of legislation because it creates a level playing field for them. It is in everyone's interests that people are paid properly and that it happens.

A further point, actually, for the member for Polwarth, who unfortunately has left. When he said this legislation was doing nothing – and he was in fact incorrect, because as I pointed out to him, 600-plus investigations were being undertaken – the mere existence of legislation can sometimes be enough of a deterrent to make those thinking that they might just try and get away with stealing the wages of a worker think twice about it and maybe not do it, because they know there is legislation there and a body out there looking to investigate and catch them. That is always quite powerful too. I do challenge the position put by the member for Polwarth.

I do want to just touch on something. The member for Hawthorn was talking about productivity before. There was quite a bit of discussion there. I do just want to point out that there was an article not so long ago in the *Australian Financial Review* that talked about the Productivity Commission's investigation into productivity. Do you know, one of the things that they have basically said is that a hybrid work-from-home situation is good for productivity for the nation. Well, there you have it. I tell you what, here in Victoria we know what we are on about when it comes to making sure that the situation for all is fair.

Do you know what, I know the Fair Work Act 2009 fairly well, at least in its earlier iteration when I was dealing with it. It is a tome, I tell you, but inherently it is fair. It passes the pub test, and it makes sure that our workplace relations are balanced. There is always more to do, and we now have a Commonwealth government that has come in and gone, 'You know what, we agree with you, Victoria. Wage theft is a pretty shocking thing. We're now going to ensure that these laws apply around the country.' What a wonderful result for all of us. We were leading the way, as the member for Werribee eloquently summarised. We were leading the way at the time in 2020, and we certainly did not have a partner in Canberra at the time. And, once again, thank heavens we do.

I was reflecting on the member for Kororoit's contribution. She was not just talking about being a union leader and seeing the devastation that wage theft can cause, she experienced it herself – \$7 an hour as a young woman in her job. She thought she was going okay. But her brother working at Bunnings under an agreement – my old union there – was getting paid properly, and when she saw what she should have been paid, she realised that she was being exploited. This is endemic in a lot of

areas. Young people and people who are on a working holiday visa are more likely to be exploited. If you are not a citizen of this country, you are more likely to be exploited. If you are female, you are more likely to be exploited, or if you have a disability. If an employer considers that you are somehow vulnerable, a bad one – obviously not a good one – will work to exploit that. It is our job as a government, ultimately, to try and protect those who will be exploited, and that is what this does.

Reflecting on the contributions in here today from many of those on my side, it is fundamentally important to us that people are paid properly for the work that they do. And as I mentioned before, being paid in pizza is certainly not a way to ensure – in fact we did have a bit of an example of this, but I will not go into too much detail because I do not want to name any businesses or anything. But we saw it happen as parents to one of our children as well, and it is not ideal. This is a fantastic thing. Once again Victoria led the way in the nation, and what do they say is the best form of flattery? Imitation. It is wonderful that the Commonwealth has decided that that is what they are going to do here.

Obviously this bill is quite technical, and it is repealing the wage theft offences as well as functions and powers connected to the investigation and enforcement of those offences. It is going to rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, and it will rename the act itself to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria Act 2020. It is interesting, because it will retain the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria as an independent statutory body with ongoing responsibility for regulation of child employment, long service leave – which is still state – and owner-drivers and forestry contractors.

Child employment is an interesting area. When I was at the union I ended up on a working panel for child employment, and it was often children in the media industry or in circuses – so in entertainment – where we saw children being legitimately employed. We were sitting around this table and there had been an amendment put forward for the pattern of hours for children in entertainment. They were trying to make it a little bit more workable for filming – for example, television shows like *Neighbours*. There were some people around that table, really fascinating people, and one of them was a tutor of young children who worked on television sets. We had noted when we looked at the new pattern of hours they had put forward that there would be an unintended consequence, and you could have ended up having a child employed on a rolling basis, basically working a terrible number of hours. I do not have access to that paper anymore – if I could bring the detail in I would – but they would literally have been able to be continuously employed far beyond what they could at the time. It was unintended – it was just the way it was structured – and when I put that forward to them we worked out we needed to tidy this up and make sure that no child could be employed for as long as this was going to allow for. I said, ‘But it wouldn’t really be an issue, would it?’ I was probably a bit naive. And the tutor of the young children on a television set said, ‘Oh, yes, it could be,’ because there were some parents out there who, if it meant more money coming in, would not care how much that child was working. So it is incredibly important that we have regulation of child employment in this state, because not everyone is going to do the right thing all the time.

Once again, that is the role we have to play as the government. We are there to protect those who could be exploited or who sometimes are exploited. That is why this particular bill is fundamentally important. I am glad, as I said before, that the opposition will not be opposing it, but some of the contributions that have come from over there have been fairly interesting, to say the least, and that is probably me being very, very diplomatic. I do commend this bill to the house. I am quite pleased that this will go through and we will not have to divide on it, which means we will all get out of here a couple of minutes earlier, so that is great. I do thank you for listening to me, and I commend the bill to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (16:52): I have got the privilege of having the graveyard shift today and a few people coming in to listen to my exciting contribution.

John Pesutto: Hear, hear.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you, member for Hawthorn, for jumping in earlier as well. I also rise to speak on the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025. As we have heard throughout the day, it is a bill that we do not oppose. I am going to try and sift through some of my notes so I am not repeating too much today, Acting Speaker, because I can see that you are starting to get exhausted from your time in the chair. As we know, this legislation is changing the existing Wage Theft Act 2020 in several ways, and this has come about because it is necessary to match the Commonwealth's new wage theft laws that started on 1 January this year. Skipping through some of the details, I am going to get to the point, because this does actually keep us focused. I will get to the point because it does have an impact on my electorate of Euroa. These changes mean that Victoria's wage theft offences are now redundant, and removing them will prevent confusion for both workers and businesses.

I want to take the chance quickly to reflect on the member for Werribee's earlier review of some of what is in the legislation regarding the Wilson review, and while it was a very colourful contribution, he really failed to talk about the number of recommendations that are here, and this is what we are really disappointed in on our side of the house. As we know, the Wilson review came about following the Premier's comments about wanting to stamp out the rotten culture from the CFMEU. We heard the bombshell reports that expose the criminal activity, the violence and the misogyny on Victorian Big Build sites. So you would imagine that those recommendations are all in here, wouldn't you? Surprise, surprise: it is a bit light on detail.

The review was set up after the shocking allegations, and we have heard about that – intimidation, coercion, anti-competitive behaviour and a lot of other unlawful activity – and this impacts every single Victorian. Every single Victorian is paying rates and tax and is contributing. It was supposed to be a blueprint for cleaning up the industry, and it handed down eight recommendations – wonderful. Today's legislation implements just two of those, so this is not reform; this is a distraction. Victorians are still waiting for the rest of the review to be acted on, and that delay is absolutely no accident. We have heard that throughout, and the member for Polwarth had a great contribution regarding what that delay tactic means. Rapid is not rapid in this government; we know that.

From the outset, the Liberals and Nationals have been really, really firm that we just felt the Wilson review did not go far enough. It failed to investigate corruption on state government sites, and we feel that only a royal commission can get to the truth and show Victorians exactly how their money is being spent – and this matters. The Premier, trying to be tough on the issue, was the former minister for the Big Build, the minister who oversaw the massive cost blowouts and the minister who failed to take responsibility for preventing violence, corruption and misogyny on these sites. The government have known about the rotten culture with the CFMEU for years, but it is only because the media exposed it that they are taking any action at all. Even this morning the *Age* was reporting that the CFMEU hand-picked a man who has now been arrested for an underworld execution, for a lucrative health and safety role on the Big Build sites. I would go as far as saying this is enabling this sort of behaviour to happen. I just think it defies belief that the way we are learning about this is through the media. How is this acceptable? The Premier and her ministers appear to be completely incapable of stamping out the allegations of corruption, of lawlessness, on these Big Build sites, and only a proper inquiry, a proper royal commission, will uncover the full extent of this true rotten culture.

Every Victorian is paying the price for this rotten culture, and I thank people joining this debate and listening to my contribution, because we do have genuine concerns about the financial management of this government. Why does it matter? Every single community is impacted when this government cannot manage money – \$1.2 million in interest every single hour, for those that are asleep on the back bench. It is \$1.2 million every single hour – boy oh boy, could that buy some things in the Euroa electorate. We are paying the price for this government's financial mismanagement. Instead of tackling the CFMEU head on, the Allan Labor government want to protect their own jobs, their own political donations and their own allegedly corrupt mates. But Victorians deserve more than these half-measures. They deserve a government prepared to clean up the industry, restore integrity to public projects and put the public interest ahead of union mates and backroom deals.

This is having a regional impact. While debt piles up and Melbourne-based infrastructure projects go from problem to problem, blowout to blowout, regional areas continue to be ignored. I have so many examples of this. Housing initiatives like the Benalla West project – blowouts, delays. Kilmore is unable to secure a public secondary school – one of the largest communities in regional Victoria, without a public secondary school. I thought we were the Education State – only if it is in Labor seats. New childcare facilities in Seymour have been pushed back nearly 10 years after they were initially announced – and that is if they are delivered at all. What is concerning is the health of regional Victorians is now being impacted as well. Vulnerable patients in towns like Benalla, a huge town with nearly 14,000 people – we have no dialysis unit. These are lives that are being impacted by the Allan Labor government's financial mismanagement, and we are absolutely paying the price with our health. We have got some people paying for their patient transport for their health, and they are not even being reimbursed – hundreds and hundreds of dollars. This is the personal toll of a government that cannot manage money. The bill, as you have heard throughout the day, does not go far enough.

We have concerns with the bill; you have heard them today. I am skipping through. I have got 44 seconds to bring it home. Wage theft is still a concern.

Martin Cameron: Bring it home.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I am going to; you just buckle up. The government cannot manage money, and regional Victorians are paying the price. But I just want to talk about one of the concerns, which is the amount of businesses that are going under because of the weight of the taxes and the financial pressure on this government. We depend on them for jobs – we absolutely need them to survive. Regional Victorians deserve more than these half-baked measures. They need transparency and a government with integrity. We on this side of the house will keep fighting until our workers are protected, our businesses are thriving and every major project is delivered with integrity and accountability, on time and in budget.

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

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Michael O'Brien's amendment:

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

- (a) urgently provides Victoria Police and Corrections Victoria with all resources necessary to implement this bill without further delay; and
- (b) adopts the Liberal and National parties' 'break bail, face jail' policy to ensure that Victoria's bail laws do not continue to fail to protect community safety.'

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

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

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

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (51): Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

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

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (73): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

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

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Nick Staikos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Rulings from the Chair

Questions without notice and ministers statements

The SPEAKER (17:09): Earlier today the member for Ringwood raised a point of order asking about actions the Minister for Health may take in relation to statements she made in the house yesterday. I note that it is not the Chair's role to determine what actions or contributions a member may make in the house beyond those matters expressly provided for in standing orders and sessional orders. *Rulings from the Chair* confirmed that this is the case. For example, on 21 March 2017 Speaker Brooks ruled that the Chair cannot order or require members to make personal explanations. I therefore find that there is no point of order in relation to the matter raised by the member for Ringwood.

The Leader of the Opposition also raised a point of order earlier today asking whether the Premier will provide information she took on notice earlier this week. Similarly, it is not the Chair's role to determine whether or not members have done things they refer to in the house, and I rule the point of order out of order.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Croydon electorate road safety

David HODGETT (Croydon) (17:11): (1261) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to prioritise driver and pedestrian safety by installing traffic lights at the corner of Lusher Road, Anzac Street and Mount Dandenong Road in Croydon. My constituent Beverley Clarke, who lives on Lusher Road, has witnessed many accidents and near misses at this intersection over the years and increasingly over the last six months. Some examples include cars turning left out of Lusher Road not giving way to cars doing U-turns on Mount Dandenong Road; cars travelling along Mount Dandenong Road indicating to turn left into the Shell petrol station driveway which is near the corner of Lusher Road, not turning down Lusher Road, and their turning intentions being misinterpreted; and cars speeding across the double lanes coming out from Anzac Street and across the lanes. Mount Dandenong Road is a major road with high volumes

of traffic, especially during peak times. Combine this with the increase in traffic on Lusher Road due to the large number of unit developments and public housing being built, and the result is more traffic, more congestion, more accidents and more near misses at this intersection.

Anzac Street adds to the complexity of this intersection as people accessing the Croydon police station are parking down this road, creating blockage and obstruction, and as previously mentioned, local traffic wanting to turn right into Mount Dandenong Road from Anzac Street must cross double lanes, avoid cars turning into Anzac Road, avoid cars turning both ways out of Lusher Road and avoid cars doing U-turns along Mount Dandenong Road. Traffic lights would also help pedestrians navigate crossing all these busy roads. There is currently a pedestrian crossing 20 metres down on Mount Dandenong Road, which used to service the former Croydon Community School, which is now closed having been relocated to a brand new facility on Croydon Road. This pedestrian crossing is used; however, it does nothing for the pedestrians trying to cross busy Lusher Road. Minister, I urge you to install traffic lights at this intersection before there is a fatal pedestrian or motor vehicle accident. Again, the action I am seeking is for prioritisation of driver and pedestrian safety by installing traffic lights at the corner of Lusher Road, Anzac Street and Mount Dandenong Road, Croydon.

Pick My Park

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:14): (1262) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts in the other place, and the action I seek is an update from the minister on how residents can work with the local government regarding the Allan Labor government's Pick My Park initiative. During the by-election I believe I knocked on nearly every door in the Glen Orden area and spoke to the amazing residents. It is one of the lower socio-economic corners of the electorate and indeed the whole Wyndham LGA. For a long time it has not had a lot of attention from all levels of government, and one of the actions I committed to was to make sure that wherever possible we were securing funding and opportunities for this amazing community. One lady, the grandmother of one of my ex-students that I taught, bemoaned the state of the local playground and just wanted some love for the area for the children that use it. With the Pick My Park initiative providing funding of between \$20,000 and \$250,000 for new parks and upgrades of existing parks, this program will be a great opportunity for my electorate. In conclusion, I would like to see that update, and while our community grows, I want to make sure our older communities in Werribee also get the attention they deserve.

Emergency communication services

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:15): (1263) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and it concerns the tragic death of Alfred Edwards on the front lawn of his house in Swan Hill on 5 January 2022. When Mr Edwards collapsed, members of his family rang 000 repeatedly but could not get through. They also rang Swan Hill police station, and the sergeant on duty, who came to the Edwards home, subsequently went to the Swan Hill ambulance station to get assistance for Alfred. Ambulance officers were actually at the station but because 000 was not answering were unaware of the case until police knocked on the door. The Edwards family believe they are owed an explanation as to why they could not get through to 000 despite repeated calls over a 30-minute period.

I raised this issue with the Minister for Health in the adjournment debate in February 2022, but the request was ignored – with no surprise from that particular minister. Again I raised the issue with the then Premier in question time on 8 June 2022, and he responded that he had been advised that the acting CEO of ESTA had spoken to the family but would check if that was correct. Alfred's son David Edwards recently contacted me about this issue again, and he told me no-one from ESTA, Ambulance Victoria or the government has ever contacted them with an explanation as to why they could not get through to 000 when their husband and father was dying. Minister, can you please respond to the Edwards family's plea for a response so they can have some closure on the tragic death of Alfred?

Albert Park electorate economic development

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:16): (1264) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs the Honourable Danny Pearson. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Albert Park and see firsthand the great work of local businesses who are contributing to industry growth and employment opportunities in my area. Our Allan Labor government is supporting major new investments to boost jobs and grow the state's tech and innovation sectors, such as the recently announced groundbreaking \$2 billion investment by digital infrastructure giant NEXTDC, which will build a next-generation tech campus in Fishermans Bend. The new M4 Melbourne campus will be a world-class facility featuring an AI factory, a mission-critical operations centre and a technology centre of excellence, putting Victoria on the map as a national leader in digital infrastructure and innovation. This project is being delivered with the support of the Allan Labor government and aligns with the broader vision for the Fishermans Bend innovation precinct, an initiative kickstarted with our \$180 million government investment and set to support up to 30,000 jobs by 2051 in science, technology, engineering and design.

Victoria's thriving tech sector already contributes \$34 billion to the economy and supports over 306,000 workers, representing 30 per cent of Australia's tech workforce. Our government's recently released *Victorian Industry Policy* and our \$240 million commitment in the 2025–26 budget will ensure Victoria remains a leader in future-focused industries, including tech and defence. A visit from Minister Pearson would provide an opportunity to showcase this transformative investment, demonstrate the collaboration potential between government and private industry and reinforce Victoria's commitment to supporting job growth and industry innovation. I look forward to the minister's response and the chance to welcome him to my electorate soon to see all of the exciting work that is underway in Albert Park.

Community safety

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:18): (1265) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is his public clarification on whether he believes Mr Richard Minack is suitable to teach and whether he will be returning to teaching or leadership roles in Victorian public schools. Mr Minack was found in 2023 by the Federal Court to have unlawfully discriminated against four Jewish students by failing to address antisemitic bullying and swastika graffiti at Brighton Secondary College while principal there. In her 450-page judgement Justice Mortimer found that there was an inexplicable and unusual tolerance for antisemitic graffiti and a preparedness to ignore, downplay and take less seriously the complaints made by Jewish students and their families at the school under Mr Minack's tenure. The court heard that one student was bashed, spat at, called an 'effing Jew', told to die in an oven, had 'Heil Hitler' drawn on his locker and was held at knifepoint. The court also singled out another teacher at Brighton Secondary College at the time, Mr Paul Varney, for not taking antisemitic behaviour seriously and for repeatedly addressing a Jewish student in Hebrew, causing him embarrassment and humiliation.

The court found that Mr Minack had breached section 9 of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 by his failures and omissions to take action at a systemic and coordinated level to address a high level of antisemitic bullying and harassment of Jewish students by other students and high levels of swastika graffiti at the school and to enforce the policies of the school on racial harassment in relation to antisemitic bullying and the harassment of Jewish students by other students and in relation to the display of antisemitic graffiti at the school. The minister will of course be aware that the Department of Education was required to pay damages to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars to the Jewish students who brought the case and issue a written apology.

However, the *Herald Sun* has reported this week that Mr Minack remains an employee of the Department of Education, has retained his registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and has not faced any disciplinary action. I understand that Mr Minack retains his employment with the Department of Education and is currently on leave. I note the department has not advised whether this

leave is paid or not. I also note that the Victorian Institute of Teaching is responsible for ensuring that those who apply for registration are suitable to teach – that is, that their character, reputation and conduct are such that they should be allowed to teach in a school or early childhood service. The Minister for Education has repeatedly said that antisemitism has no place in our schools or in our state. So I ask the minister again: does he believe that Mr Richard Minack is suitable to teach as per the definition provided by the Victorian Institute of Teaching and will Mr Minack be returning to teaching or leadership roles in Victorian public schools in the future?

Schools funding

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (17:21): (1266) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and it is regarding the investments the Allan Labor government is making to support schools in multicultural communities. Since the election of the state Labor government in 2014, new schools have opened up just about every year in the suburb of Wollert. To date there is a total of seven brand new state schools and two brand new Catholic schools, and these schools are often seen as social hubs as well as learning hubs for families and students, providing facilities to learn but also to play sport and to support wellbeing. I often meet with and discuss the needs of schools with school representatives such as principals and teachers as well as students and families. In addition to the academic needs of the students, schools have also been instrumental in supporting multiculturalism and social cohesion. Many students are from refugee backgrounds and are often starting school before they have attended English classes. There are also students that have recently migrated to Australia with their families and require additional support to become comfortable in a Victorian educational environment. Of course culture and diversity are celebrated in all of these schools in Wollert. But the action I seek is that the minister provide information to me regarding the supports and investments that we are making in schools, particularly in relation to multicultural communities.

Murrayville Memorial Bush Nursing Hospital

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:23): (1267) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to come to the small farming community of Murrayville and have a look at the Murrayville Memorial Bush Nursing Hospital, which is in desperate need of a new roof. I have written to the Minister for Health Infrastructure on earlier occasions, in fact last year and earlier this year I believe. This is a very small community near the South Australian border who are very proactive not only in their health care – they have been able to attract different allied health professionals and a nurse practitioner to the Murrayville Memorial Bush Nursing Hospital – but also in their very active Landcare group, with a very active and proactive Landcare facilitator and a beautiful wetland. It is part of the Mallee track, so as part of her role also as the Minister for Roads and Road Safety a drive out along that very straight road might also be beneficial. But the Memorial Bush Nursing Hospital at Murrayville is in desperate need of a new roof. It leaks. There are many, many issues, so I would appreciate a visit from the Minister for Health Infrastructure to come and see it firsthand and also chat with the community group, a volunteer-led community group, which keeps this bush nursing hospital and community centre running.

Banksia Gardens Community Services

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:24): (1268) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. I ask the minister to visit Banksia Gardens Community Services in Broadmeadows to meet the remarkable young people involved in the Good People Act Now program, GPAN. GPAN is a youth-led initiative making a meaningful impact on our community. It empowers young people to challenge gender stereotypes, foster respectful relationships and advance gender equity. Born out of a response to the devastating rates of family violence in Hume, GPAN is driven by passionate young leaders committed to building a safer, more respectful world for everyone. When I attended a GPAN session, I was deeply moved. These young leaders, many with lived experience, are speaking out with courage and clarity. They are challenging harmful gender stereotypes and promoting respectful relationships through workshops, performances, school visits

and social media. Their work is powerful and their impact is real. What struck me most was their honesty and heart. They are not just advocating for change, they are living it. They are showing their peers what it means to stand up, speak out and support one another. Their leadership is inspiring, and it is creating ripple effects across our community.

Banksia Gardens has been a vital support for GPAN, offering a safe and inclusive space for these young people to grow and to lead. I want to acknowledge the incredible work of Georgia Arnold-Ransome, the gender equity coordinator, whose warmth and dedication have helped shape GPAN into the force it is today. In a time when gender-based violence continues to harm so many, GPAN offers hope. It shows us what is possible when we invest in young people and trust them to lead. I look forward to the minister visiting Banksia Gardens, listening to these young voices and exploring how we can support and expand this gender equity model across Victoria, because when young people lead with heart, they do not just change lives, they change communities.

Owners corporations

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (17:26): (1269) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, who is at the table. Firstly, I would like to thank our fantastic Minister for Consumer Affairs for the important work he is doing on the independent expert panel review of the Owners Corporation Act 2006. I was contacted in this regard last month by my constituent Naomi about the significant stress and financial loss she has experienced due to poor conduct by her owners corporation manager. When her owners corporation sought to terminate the manager's contract, funds were withdrawn without proper authority for preparing records for transfer. The manager also threatened further changes and the funds were not returned in full. This left Naomi and her fellow owners with an additional financial and emotional burden in terminating the manager. They now face the prospect of navigating alternative dispute resolution through Consumer Affairs Victoria and, if necessary, VCAT, a process that possibly demands considerable time and energy. Naomi supports the ACCC's recommendations to make it illegal for owners corporation managers to receive commissions or benefits in procuring services and for them to operate on a transparent fee-for-service basis only. I will forward the minister Naomi's correspondence, but the action I seek is that he consider Naomi's experience as part of this review, to help strengthen protections for all Victorians living under an owners corporation.

Peter Walsh: Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Responses

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (17:29): I thank the member for Ashwood for raising this important matter on behalf of his constituent Naomi. It is exactly this reason concerning what the member for Ashwood has described in terms of Naomi's experience with her owners corporation that we are reviewing the Owners Corporation Act 2006. We are reviewing the Owners Corporation Act because it is more important now than ever. One in four Victorians live in strata-managed properties, and due to our housing targets we of course will see more and more Victorians living in multidwelling developments. Therefore we will see more and more owners corporations, so we want to get the legal framework right when it comes to owners corporations.

I can inform the member that I have asked the Honourable Marsha Thomson, a former Minister for Consumer Affairs, to chair a review panel. The review panel will also consist of Karen Chester, who is an accomplished economist with expertise in regulatory policy, and also David McKenzie, who is one of Victoria's leading lawyers specialising in owners corporation matters. That review panel is going to consider a number of issues concerning the Owners Corporations Act. They include, but are not limited to, hardship arrangements for lot owners struggling to pay fees, voting requirements among lot owners, measures to enforce compliance with the act and collective sales laws for strata

developments, but I think Naomi will be most interested in this one – that is, the probity and conduct of owners corporation managers, including conflicts of interest, unfair contracts and commissions.

I can confirm for the member for Ashwood that consultation is now open on the Engage Victoria website, that the review panel is consulting widely and that consultation on the Engage Victoria website will be open until 2 September 2025. I certainly encourage the many Victorians who live in strata-managed properties to contribute to this review of the act, because as minister I am determined to ensure that we have the best possible legal framework that protects people who live in strata-managed developments. I will undertake for the member for Ashwood to refer Naomi's concerns to the review panel for their consideration.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:32): I express my condolences to the Edwards family. I am very sorry to hear of their experience on the death of Alfred Edwards, and I undertake to find out what has happened and respond to the member for Murray Plains. I may need to do that in conjunction with the Minister for Emergency Services, who has responsibility for 000, but we will work together to ensure that a response is provided for your constituents.

The member for Croydon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action he seeks is that the minister prioritise the safety of drivers and pedestrians in particular and look at the tricky intersection of Lusher Road, Anzac Street and Mount Dandenong Road in Croydon. The member for Werribee raised a matter for attention of the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts in the other place. The action the member is seeking from the minister is an update on the progress of Pick My Park, a project which I must say has garnered a lot of excitement and enthusiasm amongst the very many members on this side of the house that represent growing suburban communities. I am sure the minister looks forward to providing that update. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, and the action she seeks is that the minister visit her in her electorate and meet with many exciting and innovative local businesses. I am sure the minister looks forward to that.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the Minister for Education. The action she seeks is clarification on the minister's position in relation to the employment status of a former principal at Brighton Secondary College. The member for Thomastown raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action that the member seeks is that the minister provide her with information in particular about the many initiatives and investments our government is making to support schools that serve multicultural communities. I thank the member for her advocacy on behalf of her community. I am sure the minister looks forward to providing her with that update.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health Infrastructure. She has kindly and warmly invited the minister on a trip to Murrayville to visit the Murrayville Bush Nursing Hospital. In particular I think she would like the minister to come and see the state of the roof. I will pass that on to the minister. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action she seeks is for the minister to come and meet the young people running the Good People Act Now project at Banksia Gardens. This is an incredible project – I have some firsthand knowledge of it – and I am sure the minister cannot wait to get out and meet those incredible young people who are doing such great work in the member's community.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, ministers. Thank you, members. And, as always, thanks to our great parliamentary staff. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:35 pm.