



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 6 March 2024**



**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

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Ben Carroll

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

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

**Leader of the Nationals**

Peter Walsh

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	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 <sup>5</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	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	Prahran	Greens	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 <sup>6</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>6</sup> Sworn in 3 October 2023

**Party abbreviations**

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

# CONTENTS

---

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion .....	689
PETITIONS	
Latrobe River Bridge, Tyers Road.....	689
DOCUMENTS	
Documents .....	689
BILLS	
Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023 .....	689
Council's amendments.....	689
MOTIONS	
Middle East conflict .....	689
COMMITTEES	
Electoral Matters Committee.....	690
Reporting dates .....	690
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Henry 'Harry' Bowden Dickson.....	690
International Women's Day .....	690
Land tax.....	691
Ovens Valley electorate river management.....	691
Oakleigh Golf Course .....	691
Princes Highway Reserve.....	691
St Leonard's Uniting Church, Brighton .....	691
Montclair aged care .....	692
Green Links grants .....	692
Yarragon Primary School .....	692
Pharaoh's Secret Angels .....	693
Middle East conflict .....	693
<i>The Shadow that Follows</i> .....	693
Robinvale College .....	693
Mental health.....	694
Melbourne Youth Orchestras .....	694
Melton City Little Athletics.....	694
Victorian Mosque Open Day .....	694
Melton electorate playgroups .....	694
Flavour Fest.....	695
Punjabi music festival .....	695
Team Teal.....	695
Morwell electorate funding .....	695
Western Victoria fires .....	695
Dunkley by-election .....	696
Mulgrave Reserve.....	696
Nazareth College .....	696
Bellarine electorate grants.....	696
International Women's Day .....	697
Northern Aquatic and Community Hub.....	697
Melbourne Youth Orchestras .....	697
Lunar New Year .....	698
Elizabeth Meredith .....	698
Mayone-bulluk kindergarten.....	698
STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS	
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.....	698
Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates.....	698
Standing Orders Committee .....	700
The Inclusion of Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders: Interim Report .....	700
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.....	701
Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates.....	701
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.....	702
Gambling and Liquor Regulation in Victoria: A Follow up of Three Auditor-General Reports.....	702
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....	703
Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates.....	703

# CONTENTS

---

Environment and Planning Committee .....	704
Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works .....	704
<b>BILLS</b>	
Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023 .....	705
Council's amendments .....	705
Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024 .....	709
Statement of compatibility .....	709
Second reading .....	711
National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 .....	713
Statement of compatibility .....	713
Second reading .....	714
National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 .....	715
Statement of compatibility .....	715
Second reading .....	719
Statute Law Revision Bill 2024 .....	721
Second reading .....	721
<b>QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS</b>	
Housing .....	744
Ministers statements: education funding .....	746
Maryvale paper mill .....	746
Ministers statements: volunteers .....	747
Energy policy .....	748
Ministers statements: economy .....	749
Energy policy .....	749
Ministers statements: youth .....	750
Housing .....	750
Ministers statements: volunteers .....	752
<b>CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS</b>	
Polwarth electorate .....	752
Pakenham electorate .....	753
Murray Plains electorate .....	753
Hastings electorate .....	753
Sandringham electorate .....	753
Broadmeadows electorate .....	753
Richmond electorate .....	754
Kororoit electorate .....	754
Nepean electorate .....	754
Bayswater electorate .....	754
<b>BILLS</b>	
Statute Law Revision Bill 2024 .....	755
Second reading .....	755
<b>MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE</b>	
Education .....	768
<b>BILLS</b>	
Statute Law Revision Bill 2024 .....	792
Second reading .....	792
<b>MOTIONS</b>	
Apology for past care leavers .....	793
<b>ADJOURNMENT</b>	
Community safety .....	803
Brentwood Preschool .....	803
War Widows Day .....	804
Western Victoria fires .....	804
Brighton electorate crime .....	805
Westmeadows war memorial .....	805
Suburban Rail Loop .....	806
Alamanda K-9 College .....	807
Kew electorate schools .....	807
KooyongKoot Alliance .....	808
Responses .....	808

# CONTENTS

---



**Wednesday 6 March 2024**

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

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

**The SPEAKER (09:33):** General business, notice of motion 17, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing by 2 pm today.

*Petitions***Latrobe River Bridge, Tyers Road**

**Martin CAMERON (Morwell)** presented a petition bearing 150 signatures:

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the repeated closure of the Latrobe River Bridge due to flooding of the causeway on Tyers Road, Tyers.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the State Government to fund and deliver works to raise the causeway on Tyers Road and install culverts to prevent further flooding.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

*Documents***Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse at Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools – Ordered to be published

Ombudsman – Investigation into healthcare provision for Aboriginal people in Victorian prisons – Ordered to be published.

*Bills***Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023***Council's amendments*

**The SPEAKER (09:35):** I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023 with amendments.

**Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.**

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

**Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (09:35):** I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that, since the house resolved on 17 October 2023 to stand with Israel, the following have occurred:
  - (a) over 100,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed or injured; and
  - (b) a growing humanitarian catastrophe is occurring in Gaza; and

- (2) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza.

**Leave refused.**

*Committees*

**Electoral Matters Committee**

*Reporting dates*

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

That the reporting date for the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election be extended to no later than 1 August 2024.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

**Henry 'Harry' Bowden Dickson**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (09:37): Hey, Harry, I hope you and your crew are celebrating your amazing achievement. Many in this room will not know him, so for the information of the Speaker and the house this members statement is going live to my mate Henry Bowden Dickson, or Harry to many that know him. Harry was born on this day, 6 March, in 1919. And, yes, to the Hansard team, you heard that right: it was in 1919 that Harry was born. Harry is 105 today.

Harry lives in Berwick but has had an amazing life and has seen so much. Born just months after World War I, Harry has seen many conflicts around the globe, including World War II, Vietnam, Korea and more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, and sadly more conflict is going on today. Harry is a mad Richmond supporter and was around for all but two of the 15 premierships, and I know he simply loves his club. I am pleased to say that he saw 13 of those 15, but I am not a fan of 2000 or 1967, when they beat my beloved Cats. Harry was born during the influenza pandemic of 1918 to 1919 and survived COVID during 2020 to 2021.

The question most have of Harry is: does he still have his marbles? I can confirm that Harry at 105 is funny, honest and a great conversationalist. He can hold an audience and recall details for a great yarn. Harry is 105. He has had a glass of whiskey nearly every day of his life since he was 16 years old at 3 pm, and I invite the room to celebrate with me at 3 o'clock with a glass of whiskey.

**International Women's Day**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (09:39): Every year we come together to celebrate the role of women in every aspect of life for International Women's Day. Today as the Minister for Women I would like to acknowledge the work of some incredible Victorian women that were inducted onto the 2023 honour roll for women: Kate Jenkins, author of the Jenkins report, who last year completed her seven-year term as Australia's sex discrimination commissioner, where she led numerous inquiries with a focus on workplaces, Parliament, education, sport and security organisations; Aunty Esme Bamblett, who is the CEO of the Aboriginal Advancement League and has been since 2008 and has made major contributions to the study of how to conduct research with Aboriginal communities ethically and thoroughly; and Shanleigh Meldrum, who has undertaken a variety of roles in her career as a sensory disability professional and as a volunteer with the Victoria State Emergency Service and whose advocacy has contributed to long-term community benefits for the deaf, the hard of hearing and deafblind youth in rural and regional Victoria – an amazing young woman. These women were inducted alongside excellent company, such as Catherine Barrett, Carmen Mendez, Anam Javed, Betul Tuna, Lalisha Thapa, Jana Katerinskaja, Anne Parton, Akuch Kuol Anyieth, Thenu Herath and Cindy Pham.

### Land tax

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (09:40): My office has been flooded with complaints around the land tax bills that have been mailed out recently. The Labor government for Melbourne have run out of money, and now they want yours – and nobody is safe. Pensioners and young families have been affected across the board as the cost-of-living crisis is biting thousands of families in the Ovens Valley. The Victorian Labor government for Melbourne are showing us just how out of touch they are with working families. But the pain will continue, with Premier Allan refusing to back down on a \$50 billion tunnel that only 20 per cent of Victorians will ever use. I encourage families and pensioners who have been hit with this new tax to contact our office in Wangaratta to see if there is assistance that we can provide.

### Ovens Valley electorate river management

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (09:41): I continue to visit properties on the edge of the Ovens and King rivers that have experienced massive washouts from recent high-river events. In many cases the banks are now being washed away and the river course is being altered due to poor government management in the past, removing willow trees that were stabilising banks and placing heavy rock on some areas of the river, which pushes the problem upstream or downstream. Rivers are a community asset and must be maintained by community taxes. We have seen enough of our taxes heading down the Hume Highway to Melbourne while our rivers fall into disrepair. A fairer split of the tax pile would be a great place to start. The Ovens and King rivers are high energy, high volume and fast flowing. We need our fair share of funding in the Ovens Valley before the rivers change their course again for the tenth time in only 20 years. If a farmer neglected their property, the government would be quick to point the finger, but it is a different story when the boots are on the other feet.

### Oakleigh Golf Course

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:42): I would like to show my appreciation to those within my community and the wider golfing community in Victoria who rallied behind the Oakleigh public golf course following Monash council's decision to consider closing the course and transforming it into a park. Last year I spoke in this place and with many people in support of keeping the course an affordable, inclusive and active space for all ages and all abilities. I am very pleased to report that following an enormous local campaign, including a media campaign, last week Monash council voted to retain the golf course. Given the importance of this sporting precinct, the 30,000 rounds played every year and the incredible support shown throughout the consultation, I am disappointed that closing the golf course was even an option. I would like to commend my community and make a special mention of Sandy Jamieson and Mark Allen, who fought tirelessly to raise awareness and retain this important local facility.

### Princes Highway Reserve

**Steve DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:42): I was very pleased last week to officially open the new Princes Highway Reserve cricket training facility in Oakleigh East, made possible through a \$100,000 grant from the Victorian government to Monash council and Monash's own funds. It is a fantastic facility that will benefit the hundreds of cricketers from the Oakleigh District Football Netball Cricket Club, Clayton District Cricket Club, Mount Waverley Cricket Club and Glen Waverley Cricket Club. This adds to funding we have provided for the outdoor fitness hub precinct at the same facility. Since 2014 we have backed our local sports clubs, investing \$43 million in sport and recreation infrastructure in the Monash council area alone.

### St Leonard's Uniting Church, Brighton

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:43): The congregation of St Leonard's Uniting Church in Brighton have turned their innate spark of giving into statewide leadership through their coffee cup

challenge. The challenge asked parishioners to set aside the cost of cups of coffee in aid of supporting the homeless. This year the Brighton parish will have raised a remarkable total of \$100,000 since the initiative began. Last year's efforts saw \$22,000 donated to provide seed funding to the Ruffy Swag initiative, where backpack swags of bedding are provided to rough sleepers in the Albury region. Thank you to minister Kim Cain and Barry and Judy Schofield for their continuing leadership and compassion and for making a real difference for those in need.

#### Montclair aged care

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:44): The residents of Montclair aged care in Brighton recently had a special visitor: Buttercup the cow. The visit certainly sparked the memories of many residents who as children had milked for fresh milk. Resident Hadyn, who grew up on a farm near Deniliquin, recalled:

When I was a child, I started to help milk the cows in the morning, it was just what you did growing up on a farm.

The visit was part of an event that included Dairy Australia. University of Melbourne researchers found that when the dairy consumption of aged care residents was increased from two to 3½ serves, there was an 11 per cent reduction in falls, a 33 per cent reduction in all fractures and a 46 per cent reduction in hip fractures. Thank you to Montclair and especially to Buttercup for her forbearance in allowing me an attempt at milking.

#### Green Links grants

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (09:44): On 20 February I was absolutely delighted to share the news that Minister for Water Harriet Shing in the other place had allocated over \$605,000 to protect and enhance local creeks and waterways across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West. Made available by the Labor government's landmark \$10 million Green Links program, local creeks that are set to benefit include the Merri Creek, Edgars Creek and Moonee Ponds Creek. \$463,700 has been allocated towards the Merri Creek to focus on a 4-kilometre stretch of the creek through Coburg to create fenced, densely planted refuge areas which will provide safety and shelter for urban populations of swamp wallabies and small insectivorous woodland birds. Over 17,000 midstorey shrubs, grasses and herbs will be planted at strategic locations to improve habitat connectivity as part of the works, and up to 28 community events will be organised for locals to get involved. I was pleased to join the member for Preston, Nick Williams from the Friends of Merri Creek and Michael Longmore and Bernadette Thomas from the Merri Creek Management Committee to announce the funding.

Over \$115,900 has also been allocated to Edgars Creek to revegetate, connect and restore sections of the creek corridor through Newlands and North Coburg. Supporting the removal of weeds, works will facilitate the design and construction of new habitat areas and a nature play area for local families and kindergartens. Enhancing biodiversity works will also restore riparian habitat, improve the diversity of understorey vegetation to encourage foraging native insects and improve habitat for reptiles, with a focus on the tussock skink, which is listed as endangered under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. I was pleased of course to join Ben Davis from the Friends of Edgars Creek, David Pavone the president and Robert Urquhart the secretary.

#### Yarragon Primary School

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (09:46): I want to thank the Yarragon Primary School and congratulate their newest leaders: school captains Jacob and Levi, vice-captains Hunter and Rose and sport captains Linus, Lincoln, Cooper, Saxon, Bridget, Billie, Eleanor, Archie and Rivah. It was fantastic to speak to them about their ambitions for 2024. I cannot wait to see them later on again this year. They always ask me the hard questions when I go to schools, like, 'Why are you so bald?'

**A member:** What's the answer?

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Genetics.

### Pharaoh's Secret Angels

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (09:47): I would also like to do a shout-out to Pharaoh's Secret Angels in coming up to International Women's Day. I mentioned Liza Pharaoh last year, who was a great ambassador for netball in our area who unfortunately passed away of cancer. Pharaoh's Secret Angels have just held their inaugural junior netball carnival to raise money for the oncology unit at the West Gippsland Hospital. They managed to raise \$7500. It was an amazing achievement by all involved. So well done to Pharaoh's Angels, keep up the good work and we look forward to seeing your work in the future.

### Middle East conflict

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (09:47): I rise to condemn Benjamin Netanyahu's government in the strongest possible terms for inflicting continuous suffering on the people of Gaza and for the ongoing killing of civilians, with over 30,000 now dead, including at least 10,000 children. The killing of civilians is wrong, and I again condemn Hamas for the atrocious terrorist attack that happened on 7 October. In line with the United Nations and the federal government I again call for an immediate ceasefire and the release of hostages. My heart aches along with the hearts of my community at the human tragedy we are seeing and at the images of dead and dying children that we bear witness to. I condemn the inhumane blockade preventing aid from reaching millions of displaced, traumatised and starving people, people with nowhere safe to go and nowhere to escape to. To inflict such punishment on an entire population is reprehensible, indefensible and unforgivable. I also condemn any form of hate speech, antisemitism or Islamophobia. People have a right to feel safe. I thank those members of both the Muslim and Jewish communities who are working hard towards a lasting, peaceful and just solution for all. I have been attending meetings organised by Victorian Arabic Social Services and want to thank them and the many in my community for helping the families who have arrived from Gaza, including the City of Hume, Whittlesea Community Connections, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Foundation House, Advocates for Dignity, Australian Multicultural Foundation, Palestine Australia Relief and Action, El Rahman, Selimiye Foundation, MyCentre, Australian Multicultural Community Centre, and Immigration Migration Services Australia.

### *The Shadow that Follows*

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:49): Today I wish to acknowledge and thank schools around the electorate that Conor Pall and I visited last week. It was perhaps one of the most meaningful days I have had in this role yet. It took a bit of planning, but we delivered copies of Conor's book *The Shadow that Follows* to local school libraries. This is a really important exercise because this book should be accessible to all young people, and if just one person picks it up and identifies with it, then Conor may have actually saved a life. Thanks to Koorlong Primary, The Lake Primary School, Red Cliffs East Primary, Chaffey Secondary College and Mildura Specialist School along with St Mary's Robinvale and Robinvale College for accepting my donation of books and having Conor speak to the students whilst there.

### Robinvale College

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (09:49): Whilst I was at Robinvale College I got to meet with members of the school council, teachers and the thus far acting principal Nat Mouvet. Robinvale College is a P-12 college which has had its challenges in the past, but feedback from parents, preschool parents, teachers, school council and community members is that Nat has turned it around in the 12 months she has been acting as principal. Because Robinvale College is a microcosm of the entire community, when the school is buzzing, the entire community benefits, so the community has asked me to send a message to the Department of Education: let us keep our brilliant principal so that we can keep that positivity and hold on to our teachers and so the college and the entire community have stability. I also got to have a tour of the school and check out some of the new wings that have been constructed and the need for a Stars Foundation.

### **Mental health**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (09:50): Recently we marked three years from the final report into the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, a landmark and multiyear agenda that will support the mental health and wellbeing of our communities into the future. This government has accepted all 74 recommendations – the nine interim recommendations and 65 recommendations. This is about laying bare the challenges that we face and building a new and inclusive mental health system. We know that mental ill health touches so many people and so many in our communities have a lived experience or know someone who has been impacted during that time. But still today we see that up to three out of five people are lost to mental ill health. They do not connect with a mental health service, so before we have even had the opportunity to connect and support them, they are lost to us to mental ill health.

This government, rather than just observing the problem, has put \$6 billion into investment in and transformation of our mental health system. I want to give a big shout-out to the mental health workforce, who do so much in our community to care for and support and nurture those living with mental ill health. To the people with lived experience who are so critical in the stories and journeys – and the thousand submissions that underpin that and the workforce that they will be a part of in the future – thank you for the work that you do. And our clinicians, counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists – we need more in Victoria as we transform this system for the future. Three years on, we have got so much work to do, but we are making massive inroads in support for the mental health and wellbeing of all Victorians.

### **Melbourne Youth Orchestras**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (09:52): Today I rise to congratulate the 15 young musicians from Rowville who have recently been accepted into the Melbourne Youth Orchestras. These 15 students will have the opportunity to further progress their vocation under the guidance of some of Victoria's most talented teachers. But \$200,000 has been cut from the organisation by the Allan Labor government – \$200,000 that was earmarked to provide opportunities to students in government schools that have inadequate music programs. It is extremely disappointing that the government is so fixed, if not determined, to take this opportunity away from so many deserving Victorians looking to pursue their passion in music. This cut is going to affect those who deserve it most – those that rely on the orchestra to provide scholarships. In a cost-of-living crisis, should this government really be removing the arts from those who are already doing it tough? The arts should not be restricted to a few but promised to all. The government must reverse this decision to cut funding in the upcoming budget.

### **Melton City Little Athletics**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:53): Another busy fortnight in Melton filled with incredible celebrations and events for the whole community. The Melton Little Athletics club hosted a twilight event at the track to raise important funds for the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal. It was great to get involved and even be dunked at the dunking station. I congratulate the club, the parents and the athletes on a fantastic fundraiser.

### **Victorian Mosque Open Day**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:53): The open mosque day was another event, hosted by the Australian Sri Lankan Association in collaboration with the Islamic Council of Victoria, as well as the Qaim Foundation's own open mosque day. Some of the incredible presentations included Islamic calligraphy and of course incredible Sri Lankan traditional food. We were made most welcome by our Islamic community.

### **Melton electorate playgroups**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:53): Last week I also ventured out to visit two Melton playgroups, Melton's multicultural playgroup and the Punjabi playgroup. Both playgroups attract many young

families and encourage them to get out in the community amongst other children and parents. These groups provide many activities, including painting, story time and drawing, and many toys to enjoy during playtime. Both groups are made possible by VICSEG and their incredible facilitators, like Michelle and Karamjeet. Both Michelle and Karamjeet are Melton locals, and they have a passion for building community connections.

#### **Flavour Fest**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:54): Melton's Flavour Fest kicked off on Saturday morning at Aintree, and there were over 20,000 attendees at the event, with live music, great food and rides for all to enjoy.

#### **Punjabi music festival**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:54): Also, Melton's Punjabi music festival held on Sunday was a great celebration of traditional music and instruments. It was a great event to attend. There were over 100 people there.

#### **Team Teal**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (09:54): Lastly, the Team Teal trots fundraiser two weeks ago to raise money for – *(Time expired)*

#### **Morwell electorate funding**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (09:54): As we close in on the budget I just want to highlight the desperate need for funding on a few of the many facilities in need in the Morwell electorate.

Back in 2021 the Traralgon Football Netball Club were devastated when a major flood event wrecked their change rooms. Fast-forward nearly three years, and the rooms are still in a state of disarray and cannot be used. This major sporting club are desperately in need of funding to build new rooms that are fit for purpose for all their male and female players. The longer they wait, the more expensive it is for the council and the club to get this rebuild started.

The Tyers CFA are bursting at the seams in their current shed. They cannot properly house their vehicles, members or equipment and need an extension on their current home. With the brigade being the first responders for many incidents in their area, it is unthinkable that they have just got a shed that cannot cater for their needs. Similarly the Hazelwood fire brigade are in need of a new building as they head towards their 100th year. It would allow their brigade to cater for all their assets as well as their volunteers. They have the land, but they just need the new shed.

Once again we wait and hope for funding so these wonderful community-minded groups can have the facilities built that they deserve.

#### **Western Victoria fires**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (09:56): Our region saw some of the worst bushfires in living memory over the last two weeks. It started at Rocky Road in Bayindeen at 10:24 am on 22 February and spread from there. The fire moved quickly, spotting up to 15 kilometres ahead, with so much smoke that it created its own weather pattern across the Pyrenees region and beyond. Over 1000 emergency service members and volunteers swung into action from across our region and all over the state. Evacuation centres were quickly stood up in Ararat, Maryborough and Ballarat, with four of our local councils working hand in hand to support residents in need. To date we have lost six homes, 10 sheds, almost 300 sheep and over 22,000 hectares. This loss is devastating, especially for the Raglan community outside Beaufort. It could have been so much worse, though, if it were not for the tireless efforts of so many to protect lives, properties and communities.

On behalf of thousands of locals across Ripon I want to thank Forest Fire Management Victoria, the CFA, Fire Rescue Victoria, Victoria State Emergency Service, Victoria Police, the NSW Rural Fire

Service, Emergency Recovery Victoria, Pyrenees Shire Council, Ararat Rural City Council, Central Goldfields Shire Council, the City of Ballarat, Agriculture Victoria, Ballarat Community Health, Grampians Community Health, the Red Cross, the Victorian Council of Churches, the Department of Health, the department of – (*Time expired*)

#### **Dunkley by-election**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (09:57): I want to speak on the Dunkley by-election and congratulate everyone that was involved, from members through to volunteers, the community and voters. This by-election was brought on by their tragic passing of Peta Murphy, who I knew well, particularly from having stood against her twice, in 2016 and 2019. I know the member for Frankston knew her very well as well. While we had many disagreements of course, she was a person who was loved by the community and put her best efforts in at all times.

I would like to congratulate Nathan Conroy and his wife Steffie on all their efforts and congratulate them as well on their second baby on the way. While they did not win, they had a swing of over 3.5 per cent, which is a good swing, and if that is replicated at the federal election in the right seats, it could well mean a change of government.

I would also like to congratulate Jodie Belyea on her win, and I look forward to working with her particularly in our overlapping areas of Mount Eliza. I note that there were big swings in particular booths as well. The booth that Nathan Conroy was at had a swing on two-party preferred of over 11 per cent; the booth that I was at, at Mount Eliza North, had a swing of over 10 per cent on two-party preferred – so it shows voters are willing to make a change.

I would like to work on a commitment that was made for Mount Eliza Secondary College. I understand that that is an amount of \$7 million. I will be working to ensure that that is followed through to ensure that that is delivered not only for now but for the future for the school.

#### **Mulgrave Reserve**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (09:59): I rise today to share with the house a significant milestone, as we officially opened the new cricket training facility at Mulgrave Reserve last week. Funded by the Victorian Labor government with Monash council, the upgrades include a new four-wicket synthetic training facility and redeveloped natural turf wickets, with new irrigation, drainage and fencing. The project delivers improvements for not only the 150 members of the Mulgrave Cricket Club but also the broader community who use the grounds outside of organised matches. We all know how much I love cricket. A big thankyou to the Mulgrave Cricket Club and its president Richard Dwelly for welcoming me down for the special occasion.

#### **Nazareth College**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (10:00): I also rise today to thank the Nazareth College community for the warm reception extended to me last week. It was an immense honour to attend the blessing mass and officially open the school's new food technology and media areas, maker space room and auditorium lift. The project was proudly supported by a \$2 million investment from the Victorian Labor government. Having spent much of my formative years in a Catholic school, I appreciate the importance of the Catholic school system. Education is not just about academic excellence, it is about nurturing students to contribute positively to society. I look forward to working closely with the Nazareth community in the future to champion education and empower our youth.

#### **Bellarine electorate grants**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:00): Our government's investment in our community is really an investment in the wonderful Bellarine people. Bellarine has been successful in securing grants this year, which I know means a lot to my communities. Last month I was able to visit Headstart Early Learning Centre in Ocean Grove to congratulate them on receiving a grant to support their bush kinder program. Woodlands House Childcare and Lonsdale House Childcare were also successful

recipients of the grant, providing a number of opportunities for kids on the Bellarine to explore their natural environment.

I also recently visited two bowls clubs with updated facilities. Barwon Heads Bowling Club have recently opened their brand new clubrooms, and the St Leonards Bowling Club have beautifully renovated their clubrooms with a new deck, shed and bathroom facilities. The club and community love it, and I must say it is a great place for a Friday night meal and a raffle as well.

I would also like to congratulate the following clubs on receiving support through the sports club grant program: Bellarine Bears Baseball Club, Indented Head Yacht Club, Point Lonsdale Bowls Club, Portarlington Demons Football Netball Club and the Drysdale Badminton Club. I am very proud to be delivering for communities on the Bellarine and look forward to continuing my advocacy throughout the year.

### **International Women's Day**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (10:02): International Women's Day is on Friday, and I am very excited to invite a young woman, Bel, to come to Parliament tomorrow with her mum to celebrate International Women's Day. Bel is a passionate young woman who has created change and is doing remarkable work in her community as a First Nations woman.

### **Northern Aquatic and Community Hub**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (10:02): I recently attended the opening of Norlane's \$65.6 million Northern Aquatic and Community Hub. It was an absolute privilege to represent the Minister for Community Sport in cutting the ribbon alongside the Deputy Prime Minister and federal member for Corio Richard Marles and the mayor and deputy mayor of the City of Greater Geelong. The NACH is an incredible facility, and I am so proud to be a member of the Allan Labor government, which has provided \$8.5 million towards this project. The NACH spans two levels and includes a learn-to-swim pool, a lap pool and a hydrotherapy pool. The aquatic facilities have accessibility ramps and state-of-the-art wheelchair hoists, ensuring that visitors of all abilities can enjoy the benefits of this project. There are also a kids play area and water slides for the whole family to enjoy. The aquatic facilities sit alongside a gym, fitness studios, health consultation suites, childcare facilities and a state-of-the-art community performance hall. The NACH is designed to be inclusive and accessible for all, with features that support people of all abilities to use the facilities and concession and off-peak memberships.

My thanks to all those who worked to deliver this project, and a special thankyou to my predecessor, the former member for Lara John Eren, who was a tireless advocate for the NACH. And a big thankyou to the community reference group, whose members made an invaluable contribution to this project in ensuring that it truly meets community need. Every community deserves world-class facilities, and that is exactly what this health and recreation hub will deliver for people living in Norlane and Corio.

Thank you to Hugh Andrew, who recently completed work experience with me and wrote this members statement.

### **Melbourne Youth Orchestras**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (10:03): I rise today to inform the house that five young musicians from Narre Warren South have been accepted into the Melbourne Youth Orchestras program in 2024, and I would like to congratulate Mason Ciccirelli, Robert Danci, Hayley Cheng, Jeffrey Li and Wei Lim. The Melbourne Youth Orchestras is a program that runs on Saturdays. It has 12 large ensembles with different styles, from symphonic music through to jazz as well.

I am a very proud alumnus from Melbourne Youth Orchestras, and I am also a former education department educator there. I understand the hard work and dedication that it takes and the love of music that needs to be recognised to get into MYO. In my time there I remember being with such

greats as Ben Northey, who is now the conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra; Julien Wilson, who is a world-renowned jazz saxophonist; and Anne Frankenberg, who is CEO of Musica Viva. There are also a plethora of instrumental music teachers throughout the state of Victoria who have been through this program. It is an inclusive organisation, and I am very passionate about the organisation.

I know that Dorian Jones, the chief executive, is still having discussions with the Minister for Education and the Deputy Premier. I look forward to working with Dorian and the team at Melbourne Youth Orchestras.

### **Lunar New Year**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (10:05): For over 20 years the Lunar New Year festival has been a highlight on the Box Hill events calendar, attracting up to 100,000 people to celebrate the Lunar New Year and to experience the great multiculturalism that Box Hill has to offer. This year's event moved to a new location but was bigger and better than ever, with delectable food on offer, traditional Chinese cultural shows and fireworks which lit up the night sky. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Asian Business Association of Whitehorse president Bihong Wang, vice-presidents Richard Shi, Tim Chen and Steven Zheng and all the members of the fantastic ABAW team for organising such a wonderful celebration. Events such as these take months of planning and preparation, and it is a testament to the team that the event was a success. I also want to thank our local stakeholders Box Hill Institute, the Salvation Army, Whitehorse council and Whitehorse Manningham Libraries for their invaluable support, as well as the event sponsors.

I also want to acknowledge the contribution of the Allan Labor government: \$100,000 a year over four years to help guarantee the future of this event in the years to come. I hope that the Premier will be able to join me at the 2025 Lunar New Year festival. Finally, to everyone in our community who has celebrated the Lunar New Year: good luck in the Year of the Dragon, and may you have a prosperous year ahead. Lóng nián dàjí; gōng xǐ fā cái.

### **Elizabeth Meredith**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (10:06): Can I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Elizabeth Meredith, the recipient of the Whitehorse community achievement award. Elizabeth is a highly regarded member of various community groups including the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Progress Association, the Combined Residents of Whitehorse Action Group and the Bluebell Hill advisory committee. She has tirelessly worked to encourage residents to get involved in community initiatives.

### **Mayone-bulluk kindergarten**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (10:07): I want to pay credit to Lucy Macnamara, a very clever botanist who submitted a grant application for a bush kinder and was successful at Mayone-bulluk kindergarten. It is a really big deal for our little ones to be able to access bush kinders. Obviously the Minister for Children in the other place has made this possible, but I do want to pay credit to our early childhood educators and particularly to somebody who had the foresight as a horticulturalist to submit such an outstanding application. Our early childhood kinder teachers are a credit to us all, as are our children.

## ***Statements on parliamentary committee reports***

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates*

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (10:07): I am delighted to rise and speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2023–24 budget estimates. I particularly want to zone in on chapter 9.5.3, 'Renewable energy generation'. I want to talk about what I think is a lack of understanding in setting targets and renewable energy. First of all they are setting a budget, they are

setting time frames, but then they are showing absolute disregard for the journey on how we get there – and I will go through this in a moment. This renewable energy journey starts with a proponent; it starts with a type of energy, whether it is solar, wind, battery, others. Then there is the location and there are obviously beneficiaries. As a regional MP our communities are the location. So only one out of those four is what the regional community members have a say in, or are a part of, and that is the location. As a regional MP I have got some concerns about that, because we are not the proponent, we do not decide what type is coming and we are certainly not the beneficiaries.

Again, a small community like Dederang consists of a shop, pub, racecourse, bowls and a footy ground – that is about all there is at Dederang. It is about 20 minutes away from Mount Beauty. Mount Beauty is at the foothills of the alpine region. Like Bright, Mount Beauty is where people come for the tree change. This is what dreams are made of. People are moving from Melbourne in their droves to enjoy that change. We applaud that, we welcome that and we encourage that. Why? Because of the natural beauty, because of the fresh air, because of the pristine landscapes.

Going back to the four components that I spoke about before, the proponent in this case is Mint Renewables, who want to do a battery energy storage system set-up in Dederang. They simply refuse to meet with our community and have refused on three to four occasions. We have created so many safe, open and genuine community gatherings and they just continue to say, ‘No thanks.’

In my mind this is an absolute neglect of their responsibility, because they are thumbing their nose at the consultation process. I say to the Minister for Planning, who is the ultimate referral authority in these cases: whenever renewable energy propositions are put forward we need to have proof that genuine consultation has occurred, not just a box-ticking exercise – genuine consultation. I can tell you that is near non-existent in the Dederang with Mint Renewables. They are happy to pick off people one at a time, but the community has a list of questions they want answered. At this stage we are being told to talk to the hand.

I want to be clear that the people of Dederang and Mount Beauty are not anti-renewable – they are absolutely far from it. In fact with the hydro scheme that was put through nearly 60 years ago they were the founders of hydro-electricity in our region, so they are certainly not anti-renewables. But unless they get the answers about the batteries – the type of batteries, the risks, the fire hazards, the landscape degradation – they will find it very difficult to make decisions and go forward, and that is why I say to the minister that when it does come to that planning stage, they have to be sure that genuine consultations have taken place.

A final piece of this application is that she considers first of all whether 60 per cent of the community have support of the project. I also ask that she considers some legislation that was brought in in Alberta, Canada, which says proponents of renewable energy projects on farmland will have to demonstrate the ability of both crops and livestock to coexist on the land. We also need to adopt an agriculture-first approach. A fourth point is around coexisting with local families and communities. This is not saying no to renewables; this is just asking for some common sense.

The final piece of the puzzle is the beneficiaries. Now, I can guarantee the only beneficiary in Dederang will be the person who sells their soul or sells their farm or leases their property to this renewable energy company; the beneficiaries will not be anyone else in Dederang. We want to make sure that there is enough consultation that goes on, because the real beneficiaries are 300 kilometres away from Dederang. They benefit by turning on a light switch. They benefit by turning on an air conditioner or a heater. We do not begrudge them that – all we ask is that the local communities, the ones getting shortchanged in this process, get genuine consultation. I urge the minister when it gets to this phase to make sure that genuine consultation takes place, because it has not in these circumstances. I really hope that Mint Renewables will start that process soon, because there are a lot of gaps to fill.

### Standing Orders Committee

#### *The Inclusion of Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders: Interim Report*

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (10:12): I rise to speak on *The Inclusion of Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders: Interim Report* by the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee. I would like to thank the entire committee for the hard work they do: Speaker of the house, Deputy Premier, Deputy Speaker of the house, Leader of the House, Government Whip, deputy whip, Manager of Opposition Business, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Nationals and member for Melbourne. I would also like to thank the secretariat of the committee Paul Groenewegen, Kate Murray, Vaughn Koops and Bridget Noonan for their diligence and dedication to their work and for all that they do to make our democracy and work as smooth and as productive as possible. Parliamentary committees are dependent on their secretariats to duly discharge their duties. The support provided by them to members is critical to facilitating an informed decision-making process.

Since being elected to this place in the 2022 general election to represent the electoral district of Broadmeadows, I have become more appreciative of the standing orders and sessional orders of this place and how they affect parliamentary procedure. Not only do standing orders and sessional orders emphasise democratic participation but they also aim to streamline legislative processes to ensure that business is conducted in a timely and orderly manner. Rules governing speaking times, debate limits and voting procedures help maximise efficiency without sacrificing democratic principles. Standing orders promote fairness and equity by giving all members an opportunity to participate in discussions and decision-making processes.

The recommendations made by the committee in this report are to incorporate sessional orders and ongoing resolutions that have been effective in the house as proceedings. The first one I want to speak about regards supplementary questions. Supplementary questions play a crucial role during question time. They allow for further clarification and the ability to further elaborate on the response that has been given. They offer members a chance to challenge government policies, decisions and statements in real time. By raising supplementary questions on original questions, members bring important matters to public attention. They contribute to greater awareness and understanding of key issues and promote transparency in government actions. They enrich the overall debate during question time, allowing for spontaneous follow-up of inquiries based on the unfolding discussion. The sessional order to allow for supplementary questions was first introduced at the beginning of the 58th Parliament in 2015 and was adopted in the 59th and 60th parliaments as well. Supplementary questions have continued to serve as a valuable mechanism for promoting responsiveness and constructive dialogue within parliamentary settings, ultimately contributing to the effectiveness of the legislative process. The incorporation of the supplementary questions during question time to standing orders will keep the current government and all future governments to the highest level of accountability.

Another recommendation in this report relates to the procedure of a division. Sessional order 15 provides that the bells will ring for 4 minutes for a division. This sessional order was introduced in the 58th Parliament when the Parliament House annexe was opened to allow members more time to reach the chamber on the ringing of the bells. This grants appropriate time for members to get to the chamber from anywhere in Parliament House. It allows members to participate in the many activities that take place in Parliament during a sitting week and make the most of their time while here – for instance, the event we are having in the Federation Room at the moment. It is also important for members safety, as we do not feel that we need to take unnecessary risks in running to the chamber. The 4 minutes also allows extra time for people with mobility challenges. However, I would think this may need to be reviewed if we were lucky enough to have a person with a disability elected to this place in future.

In the 58th Parliament sessional order 4 was adopted, which specified that responses to questions on notice must be submitted to the Clerk within 30 days. This was adopted again in the last Parliament and also in the current Parliament. The 30-day time limit gives appropriate time for the answers to be

submitted, with necessary details and actions included. The Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee has recommended that the sessional order should be incorporated into the standing orders.

The report also recommends adopting sessional orders 8 and 10, which refer to the provisions for asking constituency questions and set time limits on questions and answers respectively. Constituency questions are an important part of our week's proceedings and provide members with yet another opportunity to ask questions of the government regarding important matters in their electorate. Last sitting week I had the opportunity to ask a question about Fawkner station and lighting at the station, and this week I have got some other questions that are important to the constituents in my area. I have personally received many well thought out responses from various ministers for my constituency questions and have always found them to be incredibly useful. I am glad to see that constituency questions are here to stay.

In the time I have left, I want to highlight the recommendation to adopt sessional order 18 into the standing orders. This relates to the requirement for a joint sitting – (*Time expired*)

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates*

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:17): I rise to speak today on the Public Accounts and Estimate Committee report on the 2023–24 budget estimates. I have got two areas that I am going to cover today. Firstly, I am going to go back to chapter 6, which is the Department of Transport and Planning – it starts at page 87 – around roads. We know that there is a budget allocation for roads, as there always is, for the asset and output funding, but we know that we do not see very much of it in my electorate at all. In fact the cuts in this area are quite disturbing.

I am going to actually focus today on a particular stretch of road. Don Road in Don Valley is an approximately 1.2-kilometre stretch from the Home Hotel in Launching Place on the Warburton Highway to the township of Don Valley. It is in one of the worst conditions that I have seen. It is really quite surprising how bad this little stretch of road is. It is a major thoroughfare for people travelling between Healesville and Yarra Junction and obviously the people who live in the community of Don Valley as they move out to do their shopping in larger towns. I have questions for the minister. When will this road be fixed? Minister, can you please outline for the people of Don Valley and those who use this road regularly what works are scheduled and when they will occur? It worries me greatly that some of the smallest communities miss out on roads funding, and it is really important that they are not forgotten about.

I am now going to refer to chapter 9, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, from page 145, and specifically the area of agriculture. I note that there has been \$454.8 million of departmental funding and that there have been changes in that agriculture portfolio, because it has transferred from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, or the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions now, to DEECA. Sometimes programs get a little bit lost when they are transferred, and agriculture is something that is particularly important to me.

What I am raising today is the issue of wild dogs. Wild dogs remain a huge problem in many areas in my electorate, whether it is Hoddles Creek and Yellingbo in the Yarra Ranges, Pauls Range in Dixons Creek or in the Mansfield shire at Merrijig towards Tolmie or now even at Goughs Bay – and that is quite disturbing because Goughs Bay is on Lake Eildon, and it is a top tourism destination. People go there, flock there in summer, and when you have got an interaction of wild dogs and people, that is not a good outcome.

I want to talk about the problem with the wild dogs, firstly, in the Yarra Valley. I have had people contact my office very recently about some attacks at the end of February. In Beenak Road in Hoddles Creek we had four sheep attacked, all requiring veterinary care. I have been to and met with residents in the area in Hoddles Creek, and they have told me about the packs of dogs that they see traversing

their properties but also on public land. My area is particularly heavily forested, and we need some greater work in this area.

The department are having drop-in sessions in Hume and in Gippsland, but they are not having any in the Yarra Valley. We have, at Dixons Creek, Pauls Range. I have been out to farms there where the sheep have been attacked because they border the forest, so the dogs come in. We have got nothing happening down there with these drop-in sessions, which are forming the government's plan for coming on. So, Minister, will you please schedule a drop-in session so that the residents in Dixons Creek, the upper Yarra, Yellingbo and Hoddles Creek can go and put their two bob's worth in?

I know that in Mansfield this has been a problem for a long time, in the High Country. When you have a deer problem, which we have got, every deer that dies, that is shot and left, is a meal for wild dogs, and the wild dog numbers explode. We need greater work. I do hope that the wild dog management plan is looked at favourably in the coming budget and is extended. We need a guarantee that there will be ongoing support to continue to allow wild dog controllers to bait and trap on private land and within 3 kilometres of private property. I think many people in city areas do not understand the issue of wild dogs that breed in the wild but also dogs that are let go or lost that become feral. It is really heartbreaking to see some of the photos of sheep that have been attacked and lambs that have been taken because of the wild dogs, and a lot needs to be done to prevent it. I hope in the budget we get a favourable outcome.

### Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

#### *Gambling and Liquor Regulation in Victoria: A Follow up of Three Auditor-General Reports*

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (10:22): I rise for the third time to talk on gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria. Just like *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, I too talk about the machines – not those that are sent back from the future to kill us but those that affect us and harm us in our community, which of course are electronic gaming machines. I speak particularly to recommendations 4 and 5, which review the purpose of the community benefits arrangements and the tax breaks –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Could the member just clarify which committee report?

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Certainly. The gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report, a follow-up of three Auditor-General reports – and of course the 8.33 per cent tax discount which is gained by these organisations, I would say very much unfairly. The reason that I say this is because the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, who are doing an excellent job on behalf of Victorians, have a number of reports on their website which go to each of the organisations' claims to get these 8.33 per cent tax breaks. What they do provide is a community benefit. That is what they are purported to provide, and that is why they get this discount.

I will bring up a few examples, which are randomly selected, but all of them go to the same point. The community benefits scheme that one club in particular claims is \$1.4 million worth of community benefits which are given to our community, which would be fantastic if this were the case. Unfortunately, 98.4 per cent of those community benefits are benefits which accrue to the club only for their commercial benefits. The community benefits that they claim are being given are a million dollars in wages for people who have to open the doors of the club, prepare the meals at the club, serve the drinks at the club and assist gaming at the club. None of these are community benefits of course; these are benefits for a private club.

Not just wages are covered by this. WorkCover is covered by this, superannuation is covered by this – things that are required by law to be paid. The rates and the taxes are covered by this – things that are required by law to be paid. They even go on to say that community benefits include their electricity bills, their gas bills and their insurance bills. And of the measly \$22,000 this club says is for real community benefits out of this \$1.4 million, \$13,000 of that is taken up by greenkeeping fees – that

is, mowing the lawns on golf courses, which they say is a big community benefit – and \$9000, a rounding error, of that \$1.4 million is for genuine community benefits, those of sponsorships of local clubs and room availability.

I go to another one: 98.8 per cent of the money that they say is for community benefits is in fact for club benefits – benefits for an organisation. Of the \$617,000 claimed by them, \$375,000 goes to wages. You might be surprised that the principal and interest on a bank loan is in fact a community benefit. Of course it is not. Of course this should be reviewed. They say that the bank charges that they have received, over \$8000 of them, are a community benefit – of course they are not – and their cleaning, their repairs, their super, their wages, their WorkCover and their accounting and audit fees, which no doubt are taken off the federal government's taxation rates as well. Another club – 96 per cent of what they say are community benefits are spent on wages and super and WorkCover.

This was a very important recommendation, one that I fully support and one that was fully supported by the entire committee made up of Greens, Nationals, Liberals and Labor. I look forward to the government responding to this review, because we are already taking huge steps in terms of gambling reform. In particular I congratulate the minister on the closing of all gaming venues except for Crown Casino between 4 am and 10 am. This will prevent the gaming of the system where people would successively close their gaming venues so there was 24-hour gaming in a community. I also congratulate the government on the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and the subsequent bills that have come to this place and have been approved by this place to improve gambling regulation in this state. I look forward also to my fourth report on this report. Terminator 4 is *Salvation*, so I look for salvation in this house.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

#### *Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates*

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (10:27): I rise to make a contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee *Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates*, particularly to deal with recommendation 15 and chapter 4.3, page 54, looking at the government's capital spend on the Department of Education. The issues that I particularly want to raise relate back to my electorate of Caulfield and some of the schools, particularly around that capital funding.

I do note that there has been discussion around Caulfield South Primary School and, as part of that, some funding for that school to the nature of \$10 million for upgrading facilities in that school, including a multipurpose gymnasium, basketball court, STEM centre and the like. That was part of the budget; it was allocated as part of the funding. That money has not come forward, so there are still question marks about that, particularly when looking at ensuring that there is – as recommendation 15 talks about – funding certainty and transparency. The money was announced; the school is still wondering when they are actually going to get that funding. I know Caulfield South are still in the dark in terms of their funding. There was a report just in the last 24 hours about the disrepair of many of our public schools at the moment. Particularly when it comes to the budget and looking at that funding, it is one thing to promise something, but you have got to deliver it.

I note Caulfield Junior College has a similar scenario. Caulfield Junior College has a prep student Selena. When it comes to funding, I know there is discussion about things like disability, especially ensuring our schools are brought up to standard from a disability and accessibility viewpoint. Selena is a prep student. Her French parents Karl and Nathalie signed her up to Caulfield Junior College because it offers a bilingual education-based French program. Selena presents with the condition spastic diplegia, impacting both her motor skills and her visuospatial skills. She uses a wheelchair to accommodate her mobility needs. In Selena's case, her parents have highlighted to me that the school's leadership have done everything they can to accommodate her needs, and this is about funding the basic things that you expect from a government. She is unable to operate effectively in that school.

The school's infrastructure has not received the investment to accommodate that particular student's disability. Key observations of the school's environment, including of accessibility of upper floors, where some classes, tests and library classes take place, note the need for a lift, which is not available in that school. An accessible playground has been compromised due to the soft fall. Park benches and seating areas – Selena cannot have lunch with her peers. There is a need for rest areas. Selena can become fatigued more than other students. Accessibility of bathrooms – the sinks are inaccessible. It just goes on in terms of having a school that is compliant and having a school that is welcoming.

I want to give a shout-out to the school principal, to the board, to everybody at Caulfield Junior College that is doing absolutely everything they possibly can to make Selena and her family feel welcome. But you cannot do the work if you do not have the money and you do not have the support. This government has not provided the funding for Caulfield Junior College. There is no disability parking on the school grounds for Nathalie to be able to transport Selena to and from school. We should not be limiting the options and opportunities of students with a disability. Again, the Treasurer has not accommodated it, especially in this particular report in terms of that funding. I know we have got a budget coming up. There will be an opportunity for the Treasurer I hope to be able to incorporate a lot of the funding needed by Caulfield Junior College in the next budget so that for Selena it is disability compliant and is able to offer those kinds of facilities for Selena and her family. It is the same for, as I mentioned, Caulfield South Primary School and many of the schools in my area. Public schools need funding. Certainly schools in my electorate of Caulfield are missing out, and I urge the Treasurer to fund these schools that are desperately in disrepair in my electorate of Caulfield.

### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (10:32): I rise this morning to speak to the inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works, an inquiry undertaken by the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee. Poor payment practices, such as long-term payment – some terms up to 120 days – late payment, incomplete payment and non-payment are experienced by businesses in many sectors of the Victorian economy, particularly small businesses, and particularly small businesses in the construction sector. In fact small and medium businesses, SMEs, are twice as likely to experience these problems with late payments and long and unreasonable payment terms as larger corporations.

Payment issues can cause financial hardship. If we are talking about the construction sector in particular, some of the margins on these projects conducted or worked on by small and medium enterprises are razor thin. As you can imagine, if you have a situation where you are forced into 120-day payment terms by a larger builder or a larger business that you are subcontracting for but then you obviously have to pay your suppliers within 30 to 60 days, it can cause significant financial hardship. When invoices are not paid promptly, it can affect the working capital of a business, it can result in lost revenue, it can impede business growth and it can impact the ability of a business to pay its employees, other businesses or, as I just said, suppliers. It can increase the risk that a business will become insolvent and affect the wellbeing of owners, their families and their employees. I think we can all acknowledge that this has been a situation that has sometimes been rampant within the Victorian economy, particularly within that construction sector. It can lead to financial hardship, and I think one of the most abhorrent things is that it can lead to insolvency. But also it can lead to well-meaning employees of that subcontractor going without pay.

The consequences also for the Victorian economy are absolutely profound. They can include reduced cash circulation, employment and business growth. Poor payment practices affect businesses in all industries; however, as I said, this is most prevalent in Victoria within the construction industry. Subcontractors in this sector are particularly vulnerable to poor payment practices. We have all heard some horror stories in respect to larger businesses not paying their subcontractors. I know, and I know that the member for Narracan knows, there are some large businesses that have such business practices

as quoting for very large infrastructure jobs on a negative profit margin. They have done that in the past, knowing full well that through some of these practices that I have described there will be subcontractors and smaller SMEs on that project that will be unable to continue. They will not have to pay them, and they will make their profit through that infrastructure project in that way. As you can imagine, those practices are condemned by this government, and quite frankly they are abhorrent.

There were several recommendations that came out of this inquiry. Number 1 is to empower subcontractors to make full contract claims. By doing that we would amend Victoria's security of payment laws to allow subcontractors to claim the full value of their contracts, including previously non-claimable variations and excluded amounts. It would also clarify retention money claims, limit unfair contract clauses and expand security of payment laws.

### *Bills*

## **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023**

### *Council's amendments*

#### **Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 5, line 24, omit "of the Principal Act".
2. Clause 12, lines 30 to 32, omit "the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**" and insert "this Act".
3. Insert the following New Division after Division 2 of Part 2 –

#### **Division 2A – Return to Work Advisory Subcommittee**

##### **21A WorkCover Advisory Committee**

After section 512(5) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(6) The WorkCover Advisory Committee must establish a Return to Work Advisory Subcommittee.

(7) The Return to Work Advisory Subcommittee must be chaired by the Chairperson of the Board.

(8) The function of the Return to Work Advisory Subcommittee is to advise the Board in relation to the following –

- (a) ways to promote the occupational rehabilitation and early return to work of injured workers;
- (b) the establishment, administration and operation of occupational rehabilitation services, vocational re-education facilities and return to work programs available to injured workers.

(9) In this section –

*Chairperson of the Board* means the Chairperson appointed under section 509.’.’.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:38): I move:

That these amendments be agreed to.

I will make a few brief comments if I may. I think the house is owed a bit of an explanation in relation to the house amendments, but at the outset I do want to say a few things. The workers compensation scheme here in Victoria was created by the Cain government and it will be saved by the Allan Labor government. As I said yesterday, this is a victory for Victorian workers, because Victorian workers are entitled to have a financially sustainable, functional and viable workers compensation scheme now and into the future.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Legislative Council standing committee, in particular the deputy chair Mr McIntosh, Mr Berger, Mr Galea and Ms Terpstra, for their work in this endeavour. I

want to acknowledge the important role that the labour movement has played in our dialogue and engagement. This has been incredibly difficult, and it has been a challenging environment to have been in in the last 15 months. But through talking with the labour movement and with Trades Hall and affiliates and through briefing the unions directly, the product that has been brought before this house is a much better product, and it will be a stronger, more robust bill. The dialogue and the engagement have been incredibly robust and valuable.

I know people across the sector are disappointed with this bill – I know – and I can appreciate those views. My response is: there is literally no other choice if we are to have a viable, sustainable workers compensation scheme in Victoria. The problem with the current scheme is that it is costing a fortune and it is making injured workers sicker. We can do better. We must do better – by providing the support and interventions that injured workers need when and where they need them.

I do want to acknowledge the member for Eildon for the constructive way in which she has engaged in this process, and I would like to draw the house's attention to the house amendment inserting new clause 21A, the return-to-work advisory committee. The Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into the bill recommended at recommendation 17:

That the Bill be amended to create a Return to Work advisory committee responsible to the Board of WorkSafe for the coordination of return-to-work initiatives at WorkSafe.

In response to this recommendation the house amendments insert into the bill a requirement that a subcommittee of the existing WorkCover advisory committee be established as a return-to-work advisory committee. The return-to-work advisory committee will draw from the wideranging experience of the WAC, including in accident compensation, provision of hospital services and medical services, as well as union and employer groups. While the WAC provides a forum for unions, employer groups and health and legal stakeholders to discuss WorkCover and how the scheme can be improved, to date we have not had a committee solely focused on improving return-to-work rates and developing new initiatives.

The return-to-work advisory committee will support the development of Return to Work Victoria and provide advice to the WorkSafe board on promoting occupational rehabilitation and return to work for injured workers and the establishment, administration and operation of occupational rehabilitation services, vocational re-education facilities and programs available to injured workers. The return-to-work advisory committee will be a great opportunity for experts in the field and stakeholders to share ideas so we can ensure we develop new and innovative ways to support workers to get back to work as quickly and safely as possible. The chair of the WorkSafe board will chair the return-to-work advisory committee, and this is consistent with existing practice where the chair is the chair of the WAC. Members of the WAC do not receive remuneration for their role. It is not proposed that members of the return-to-work advisory committee would be remunerated for their participation.

Clauses 5 and 12 are further amended by house amendments to correct some minor errors, and it is proposed we amend clause 5 to omit the words 'principal act' and we amend clause 12 to insert 'this act'. As I have indicated, the government have indicated we will put a freeze on premiums for the next financial year. I think this is important in light of the 42 per cent increase that we saw last year for business. I also want to acknowledge the fact that we will be expanding the board of WorkSafe by an additional person, and the additional person to go on that board will have a medical background.

We will do an independent review that will commence within three months of the act coming into being. It will report in 2024. We have also agreed to a statutory review in 2027. These reviews will be important because they will allow us to try and refine and ensure that the initiatives and the reforms are meeting the standards that we expect in relation to providing protections to injured workers, providing them with the protections and support they need to return to work as well as improving the financial sustainability. If there are unintended consequences, there will be opportunities for those to be identified. From my perspective this is a five-year journey. The bill that is being adopted by both houses represents a five-year journey on transformational reform. It will not solve the problems in the

scheme within five weeks or five months. This is a long journey before us, but this is a vitally important role that we have to take.

I will close with this. 'Power reveals,' Robert Caro wrote, and we hold these privileged positions for a very narrow period of time in our professional working lives. You have the opportunity when you are in these positions to do good, to act. The easiest thing I could have done as minister would have been to say, 'Look, this is all too hard. I don't know how to deal with this. We'll just jack up premiums, and the problem will be fixed.' All you would have seen is money haemorrhaging out of this scheme, and all you would have seen is injured workers getting sicker and sicker. That is not leadership. Injured workers deserve better, and they will do better as a consequence of these reforms. I know that this is hard and this is difficult, but I also equally know no-one will thank the Allan Labor government if this scheme goes broke in five years time or 10 years time and we had the chance to act and we squibbed it. These are important reforms. It has been difficult, it has been hard, and I know that not everyone is happy. I accept that. But I will not have this scheme fail, and it will not fail.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:44): The workers compensation system in Victoria is indeed complex, and we know that there need to be changes to fix things. The bill that was brought before the house previously had a number of issues, and we as the opposition had a lot of difficulty with the way the scheme was running and the concept of Return to Work Victoria. We were exceedingly concerned about the hit on employers last financial year with a 42 per cent increase. Opposition is very difficult, but through opposition occasionally you can get some wins. And I think here we have been able to force the government to have a closer look at the scheme and the bill and to come back to us with some answers about how things will work.

I have got a number of thank-yous that I want to give, firstly, for having the inquiry in the other place, which was short and sharp. I know a lot of people were very concerned that it could drag on, but it did not – it was short and sharp. There was a lot of good information, and a lot of things that happened there should have happened earlier. The consultation that should have been undertaken had not been. I am pleased to see that there are going to be greater levels of concentration certainly from the Liberals on that inquiry. David Davis was exceptional in the load that he carried and the work that he did, and I thank him greatly for his role. Again, as this bill was in the wee hours of last night going through its paces, Evan Mulholland, Bev McArthur, Renee Heath and Gaelle Broad also ducked in from our side and were really terrific in that work. I do also want to thank the minister for his ongoing engagement and also Liz and Naomi from his office, who I got to see quite a lot of through some of our discussions, because we were unhappy with certainly the information we were given around Return to Work Victoria.

The government were not just financially failing the WorkCover scheme but failing workers at helping them get back to work or changing jobs – and this is something that is really important, because the longer people are off, the worse it is for them. They are caught on the merry-go-round, and there are worse outcomes for everybody, particularly for the workers. Having a system that does focus on return to work and having that clarity around the objectives and the functions of Return to Work Victoria indeed is part of the amendment, which is the return-to-work advisory subcommittee, and we certainly support the establishment of that subcommittee.

As I said, we were also very concerned not just about the failures around return to work and the lack of detail and the level of consultation and what checks and balances were going to be put in place, so I am very pleased that following the inquiry the government have now agreed to have an independent inquiry that will pick up in the next couple of months and report and be public through this place by the end of the year. We were quite pleased to see that and the consultation that is going to be undertaken shortly.

One of the things that I am most pleased about is the fact that we were able to give employers certainty for the next 12 months of knowing that their WorkCover premiums would be frozen. An average of 42 per cent – I heard so many people who had premium increases of 60, 70 per cent. Depending on

how big your organisation is, if you go from \$10,000 to \$16,000 and you are a very small business, it can be very difficult. Equally, if you have to go from \$50,000 to \$110,000, it is a lot of money to find and very difficult. It is about being able to give employers that certainty for the next 12 months. Personally I would have loved to have seen a freeze for two years, but I am really hoping that through the inquiry that reports by the end of the year we have got it in a better place so that we can make that call and hopefully there should not need to be a very large increase. I am pleased that we were able to secure these. Having an extra position on the board with a particular expertise is also something that I am very pleased to see. The coalition will be supporting these amendments through the passage.

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (10:49): The headlines this morning said it all: ‘Unions irate, bosses happy’. This is all happening under a Labor government. These amendments have come back to this house after a deal was done between the Labor government and the Liberals to push through these harsh changes to WorkCover. It is going to kick workers off the scheme, it is going to deny people suffering stress and burnout access to it. And this is after an inquiry that had some 19 recommendations, which the government has not even responded to. Now we are coming back at the earliest opportunity, despite the number of issues that have been raised throughout the inquiry by unions and representatives, and we have got a subcommittee, as if that is supposed to somehow ameliorate the very harsh impacts of this bill.

And we have got, as part of the deal, a freeze on premiums. Well, that is part of the problem in the first place. The fact is that premiums in Victoria for years were significantly less than counterparts interstate. That undermined the financial stability of the scheme, and now we have got the government’s response: ‘Well, to deal with that we’re going to cut access to the scheme, and as part of the deal we’re going to freeze premiums.’ Again it is putting at risk the financial stability of the scheme.

Can I recognise my Greens upper house colleagues and other crossbenchers for their really sterling efforts in scrutinising this bill in the other place last night up until about 2 am, giving these harsh changes the scrutiny that they deserve. It went on for so long because even in that committee stage the government could not give clear answers about what the impact of this is going to be on injured workers, how it would work and who would be eligible for support and under what circumstances. There was a lot of weight put on this new business unit, Return to Work Victoria – not in this legislation, mind you – and despite these very heroic objectives of Return to Work, which is seemingly supposed to ameliorate any negative aspects of the bill, the problem was we could not even get a start date from the government. We could not get any idea about how many people it might assist, just this vague commitment that the government or the minister is working on it. This is after the government and the minister have known about the financial issues with WorkCover for years. How can any worker have confidence that this government is going to set up some sort of new approach to returning to work?

Can I also just state my concern about the tenor of the debate throughout this place, the other place and even with the amendments, which quite frankly stigmatised injured workers who are receiving compensation – as if people are on the scheme, sitting around, able to return to work but not returning, and the best way to deal with that is to kick them off the scheme or deny them coverage. This is really the worst stigmatising of injured workers who are receiving their entitlements to compensation, and this is certainly not the language that should be coming from anyone, let alone a Labor government.

Can I acknowledge the many injured workers who have reached out to me, who have shared their stories of not just their injuries at work but their dealings with the WorkCover system, which has compounded their injuries and mental distress, and the need not to deny people access but to improve the scheme to support workers to get back to work earlier. They know just how bad these changes will be for injured workers like them.

Can I acknowledge the advocacy of Trades Hall and a number of unions fighting against this bill: the CPSU and the Health and Community Services Union. The question now is: how can any worker trust

this government again? These changes come on top of a deliberate policy to keep wages low, a harsh public sector wages cap, the axing of 4000 public service jobs at the last budget and the Minister for Industrial Relations running to Canberra trying to undermine federal industrial relations laws. The question now is: what is going to be next when it comes to the anti-worker policies of this so-called Labor government?

### Motion agreed to.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

## Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024

### *Statement of compatibility*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:55): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024:

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 Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill (the **Bill**).

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

### Overview of the Bill

In December 2022, the Commonwealth Government declared an offshore wind area in Commonwealth waters situated off the Gippsland coast of Victoria. The *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021* (Cth) (**OEI Act**) governs the licensing, construction, installation, commissioning, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of offshore electricity infrastructure in the Commonwealth offshore area. Victoria retains jurisdiction over any offshore electricity transmission infrastructure to be installed in Victorian coastal waters (landward of a line that is 3 nautical miles seaward of the territorial baseline) and onshore, in order to connect the proposed offshore wind farms with the National Electricity Market via the Victorian electricity grid.

To that end, this Bill amends Victoria's public land and electricity legislation to support the establishment of a Victorian offshore wind industry. The Bill amends the *Land Act 1958*, the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and the *Forests Act 1958* to enable certain licences and permits under these Acts to be granted over public land for a term up to 21 years, for the purposes of:

- assessing the desirability or feasibility of constructing or installing offshore electricity transmission infrastructure;
- determining the optimal placement of offshore electricity transmission infrastructure; and
- carrying out an activity for the purposes of obtaining a permit or consent required by or under any Victorian Act or the OEI Act, for the construction or installation of offshore electricity transmission infrastructure,

The Bill also amends the *National Parks Act 1975* to make offshore wind energy generation companies public authorities for the purposes of that Act, enabling offshore wind energy generation companies – where consent has been obtained from Parks Victoria or the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority – to perform functions and exercise powers in, and in relation to, a park as defined in the Act. The Bill also amends this Act to enable the Minister to enter into an agreement with an offshore wind energy generation company to manage and control, or to carry out functions and powers related to the company's purpose in, certain areas specified in the Act for offshore wind energy purposes.

The Bill also amends the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to enable the Minister to declare a person to be an 'offshore wind energy generation company'.

The Bill also makes several miscellaneous amendments, including in relation to local land boards under the *Land Act 1958*, and enabling as originally intended, the Minister to make an agreement with an electricity company to use land managed under the Acts for the purposes of or in connection with the company's purpose in the future, but where the land may not currently be used for generating, transmitting or distributing electricity. These miscellaneous amendments have been assessed as not engaging the Charter.

### Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are cultural rights in section 19 of the Charter and the right to freedom of movement in section 12 of the Charter.

#### *Aboriginal cultural rights*

The Bill amends the public land Acts to provide a pathway for offshore wind developers to acquire licences of up to 21 years over public land (unreserved and reserved Crown land and reserved forest) to carry out investigative activities to enable the transmission of electricity generated in offshore wind farms in the future. These activities include the assessment of the feasibility and placement of offshore wind electricity transmission infrastructure offshore and onshore, as well as the carrying out of activities for the purposes of obtaining relevant permits or consents required for the construction or installation of offshore electricity transmission infrastructure. The Bill also empowers the Minister administering the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to declare a person to be an 'offshore wind energy generation company'.

Section 19(2) of the Charter provides specific protection for Aboriginal persons, providing that Aboriginal persons hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right, with other members of their community, to enjoy their identity and culture, maintain and use their language, maintain kinship ties, and maintain their distinct spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The rights under section 19(2) are to be read broadly and are concerned not only with the preservation of the cultural, religious and linguistic identity of particular cultural groups, but also with their continued development. Aboriginal cultural rights are inherently connected to the relevant community and the traditions, laws and customs of that community. It can include traditional ways of life including practice of spiritual traditions, custom and ceremonies, and the maintenance of a cultural connection with land, including the use of natural resources and the preservation of historical sites and artefacts. Further, Aboriginal cultural rights co-exist with, and may extend beyond, rights in other legislative schemes, including the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth).

A critical aspect of the protection of the cultural rights under section 19(2) is participation in decision-making that affects the group. This would include decisions in relation to investigative activities that would impact the ability of Aboriginal persons to maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The licensing regulatory framework provided for in the Bill does not, in itself, affect the Aboriginal cultural rights protected under section 19(2) of the Charter. Rather, any impact upon cultural rights protected under the Charter would be as a result of the issuing of a licence, permit or the entering into an agreement or consent. To the extent that any activities undertaken pursuant to a licence or a permit may affect the enjoyment of cultural rights, in considering whether to grant a licence or a permit under the new licensing provisions of the Bill, the Minister as a public authority will, pursuant to section 38(1) of the Charter, be required to give proper consideration to, and act in a way that is compatible with, human rights, including cultural rights under section 19(2) of the Charter. The Minister will also need to consider the Charter when entering into an agreement under the *National Parks Act 1975*. Parks Victoria or the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority will also need to consider the Charter when providing a consent under that Act.

That is to say, where there are cultural claims by one or more individual or Traditional Owner group in relation to the area the subject of a licence, permit, agreement, or consent the Minister or relevant body will be obliged to consider whether the licence, permit or agreement grants rights to an area which may limit the cultural rights of individuals or groups with a claim to the area, including: access and use of the land and waters; the spiritual connection to the land, including the preservation of places of cultural or spiritual significance; participation in culturally significant or traditional practices on the land, including fishing, and exercising self-determination in relation to the management of country.

In addition, the Minister, when considering whether to grant a licence under the new licensing provisions of the Bill or entering into an agreement, and Parks Victoria or the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, when considering giving a consent, will be required to do so in accordance with the statutory requirements in or under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). If enlivened, the procedures imposed by or under these Acts allow for the participation of Traditional Owners in decisions that may affect their rights and requires the Minister to consider the impact a licence to conduct investigative activities may have on Aboriginal persons with a connection to the relevant land and/or waters.

As such, to the extent that land and waters with which Aboriginal persons may have distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationships, may be impacted by the licensing regulatory framework provided for in

the Bill, there is, in my view, no limitation imposed by this Bill on the cultural rights under section 19(2) of the Charter.

***Right to freedom of movement***

Section 12 of the Charter 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 public places and services. This right is, however, not an absolute right under the Charter and may be subject to such reasonable limitations as are demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society, including the property rights of others.

Aspects of this Bill are concerned with enabling access to unreserved and reserved Crown land, reserved forest and parks under the *National Parks Act 1975*. In this regard, the Bill does not, in itself, prevent movement freely within Victoria as protected under section 12 of the Charter. Rather, the Minister, when considering whether to grant a licence or a permit under the new licensing provisions of the Bill, will, pursuant to section 38(1) of the Charter, be required to give proper consideration to, and act in a way that is compatible with, human rights, including the right to freedom of movement under section 12 of the Charter. As set out above, the Minister will also need to consider the Charter when entering into an agreement under the *National Parks Act 1975*, and Parks Victoria or the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority will need to consider the Charter when providing a consent under that Act.

Accordingly, the Bill does not, in my view, limit the right to freedom of movement under section 12 of the Charter.

**Conclusion**

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP**  
**Minister for Energy and Resources**

*Second reading*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:55): 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:**

Victoria is leading nationally in developing offshore wind having recently legislated new offshore wind energy targets of at least 2 gigawatts (GW) by 2032, 4 GW by 2035 and 9 GW by 2040, established Offshore Wind Energy Victoria to progress sector development including undertaking engagement with industry, Traditional Owners and the Australian Government on proposed offshore wind projects, and established VicGrid to coordinate the overarching planning and development of Victoria's Renewable Energy Zones and offshore wind transmission projects.

Our state is undergoing a significant renewable energy transition and the Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that Victorians have access to renewable, reliable, and affordable energy while making sure we meet our renewable energy and climate targets. Offshore wind energy is a key pillar of Victoria's renewable energy future, and I am proud to say that Victoria is the national leader and at the forefront of offshore wind development in Australia.

The Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024 is the next stage of the State's offshore wind legislative reform program following introduction of the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023.

**Amendments enabling offshore wind activities**

The primary purpose of this Bill is to extend the existing licensing and agreement regime under various public land legislation to enable offshore wind project proponents to access Victorian public land for the purpose of investigating the suitable placement of connection infrastructure between offshore wind projects and an onshore electricity grid connection point.

Offshore wind farms will be located in Commonwealth waters adjacent to the State's waters, which extend three nautical miles from the coast. Accordingly, offshore wind project proponents are required to obtain the necessary licences to undertake feasibility, research and demonstration, construction and commercial works

under the Commonwealth's *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021* and accompanying regulatory framework.

The passage of this Bill will provide offshore wind project proponents with greater certainty and continuity to undertake their project planning and design from Commonwealth waters through to the onshore connection point into the Victorian electricity grid. It will do so by:

- enabling Victorian licences to be issued to, or agreements to be entered into between the relevant Minister (or their delegate) and offshore wind project proponents to access 'public' or 'Crown' land including the Victorian seabed up to three nautical miles from the coast, for a period up to a maximum 21 years to conduct initial investigatory works, as part of any proposed construction of offshore wind farms
- allowing the Minister administering the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to declare an entity to be an 'offshore wind generation company' to allow investigatory activities to be conducted if necessary under the *National Parks Act 1975*.

These amendments are intended to work with, and not be contrary to, existing rights and obligations that apply under the Acts being amended by this Bill. Further, the amendments are intended to work with, and not be contrary to, existing rights and obligations under other legislation likely to apply to offshore wind projects notably the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*, the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Further, the licensing regime does not cover any investigatory activities proposed to be undertaken on private land. Access to private land will be a matter for project proponents to negotiate with landholders.

The Victorian Government's engagement with Traditional Owners is underpinned by self-determination. The Government aims to form genuine, meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners by transferring power back to and being held accountable to Traditional Owners.

**Amendments to the *Land Act 1958*, *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, *Forests Act 1958* and *National Parks Act 1975***

Offshore wind connection infrastructure, notably transmission cables, will traverse public land of different 'types', currently managed under different statutes. All seabed in Victorian coastal waters is regarded as public land, and the onshore components of connection infrastructure are likely to traverse public land, including reserved Crown land, unreserved Crown land and State forest.

Accordingly, the Bill amends the *Land Act 1958*, *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and *Forests Act 1958* to provide a pathway for offshore wind project proponents to acquire long term licences over public land (unreserved and reserved public land and reserved forest) of up to a maximum of 21 years in order to begin investigative activities to connect to a consolidated connection point. The Bill also enables Parks Victoria to consent to an offshore wind energy generation company carrying out such activities in a park under the *National Parks Act 1975*.

The Minister or their delegate in granting a licence must have regard to:

- whether or not the applicant for a Victorian licence is the holder of a licence under the Commonwealth *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021*
- whether granting the Victorian licence would contribute to achieving a Victorian offshore wind energy target or renewable energy generation target
- any other matters that the Minister or delegate considers relevant.

For example, other matters the Minister or delegate may consider relevant could include:

- the proposed scope and nature of the investigatory activities to be conducted on the Victorian seabed and onshore
- the period of time that the applicant wishes to have access to the land
- any known environmental or Traditional Owner cultural values or sensitivities in the area that is the subject of the application and suitable measures to avoid or mitigate impacts.

These considerations have to occur in the context of all applicable Victorian legislation. This may include meeting the requirements set out in a land use activity agreement under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, and, where applicable, requirements to obtain a consent under the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* or the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* or the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) and, for any substantial development, meeting the requirements to carry out an environmental effects statement under the *Environmental Effects Act 1978*.

The Bill also makes amendments to the public land acts to ensure that electricity companies can enter into agreements for the purposes of constructing and operating electricity infrastructure.

#### **Amendments to the *Electricity Industry Act 2000***

The Bill makes amendments to empower the Minister administering the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to declare an entity to be an ‘offshore wind generation company’. This will be limited for the purpose of investigatory work. Under existing regulatory frameworks, at the time of construction, a developer would be expected to be licenced as a generation company, a transmission company and/or a distribution company, by the Essential Services Commission.

#### **Other amendments**

The Bill also amends the *Land Act 1958* to repeal provisions requiring a public hearing to be undertaken by the Minister or an appointed ‘local land board’ prior to undertaking various land-related transactions including the issuing of licences and leases. This process, which derives from earlier Land Acts, is inefficient and administratively burdensome, and not appropriate to support contemporary land management.

The Bill also clarifies section 21 of the *National Parks Act 1975* (which relates to the granting of permits) so that the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority can grant permits in relation to parks under the Act for which it will shortly take responsibility.

#### **Conclusion**

Offshore wind is critical to the delivery of 95% renewables by 2035, and net zero by 2040. As coal-fired power plants exit, as they have flagged, the increased generation capacity of offshore wind farms provides crucial reliability assurance for Victoria’s grid. It’s not just a nice to have, and the Victorian Government is committed to enabling offshore wind project proponents to undertake the necessary site feasibility investigation works to inform their project design phase, harness the opportunities of our world-class wind resources and contribute to Victoria’s offshore wind and renewable energy generation targets.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:56): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 20 March.**

### **National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:57): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 (the **Bill**).

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

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

The primary purpose of the Bill is to amend the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* (the **National Electricity Act**) in relation to renewable energy.

The Bill will amend the National Electricity Act to:

- confer new functions and powers on the Chief Executive Officer, VicGrid (**CEO, VicGrid**) in relation to planning for major electricity transmission infrastructure in Victoria, including a new transmission infrastructure planning objective, provide for the integration of the reforms into the existing national electricity transmission planning framework and provide for cost recovery of the CEO, VicGrid’s services;
- allow for the declaration of Renewable Energy Zones by the Minister; and

- introduce a process for the CEO, VicGrid to make payments to certain landholders who host transmission infrastructure on their land.

**Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

The Bill does not raise any human rights issues.

**Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)**

As the Bill does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter Act.

**The Hon. Lily D’Ambrosio MP**  
**Minister for Energy and Resources**

*Second reading*

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:57): 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 Victorian Government is committed to managing the transition of the energy sector to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045 while ensuring the reliable supply of energy to Victorian consumers. Achieving this goal requires significant investment in the transmission network to connect and transport our new renewable energy efficiently to Victorians.

This Bill amends the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005*.

The *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* is amended in the following areas:

*CEO VicGrid*

First, the Bill will confer transmission planning functions for renewable energy zones to the Chief Executive Officer, VicGrid (CEO VicGrid). The CEO VicGrid will also be empowered to assist the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) in the performance of its functions, enabling VicGrid to conduct early works and facilitate investment in Victorian transmission projects.

*Victorian Transmission Planning Objective and Victorian Transmission Plan*

Second, the Bill introduces the Victorian transmission planning objective, which will guide the CEO VicGrid in their deliberations over transmission planning in renewable energy zones, in particular, the Victorian Transmission Plan. The requirement to publish a Victorian Transmission Plan, in which VicGrid analyses transmission infrastructure needs to accommodate new renewable generation in renewable energy zones, is the third thing the Bill introduces. The Bill details its contents as well as the process by which it will be produced.

The inaugural Victorian Transmission Plan will look to a 15-year horizon, whereas subsequent editions will look to a 25-year horizon. The first Victorian Transmission Plan must be published by 31 July 2025. The second Plan must be published by 31 July 2027, with subsequent editions due every four years thereafter.

There is also a requirement to publish guidelines on how the CEO VicGrid will go about preparing the Victorian Transmission Plan, including the scenarios it will study, key inputs, sensitivities, methodologies and assumptions, not to mention its consultation process with stakeholders.

These measures will provide transparency in the process, for identifying Victoria’s transmission infrastructure needs that will support Victoria’s commitment to net zero emissions by 2045.

*REZ Declarations*

Fourth, the Bill provides a process, including stakeholder consultation, by which the Minister will declare an area within Victoria to be a renewable energy zone (REZ). The purpose of a REZ declaration will be to identify the geographic area where renewable generation is likely to be of optimal benefit towards meeting Victoria’s net zero emissions targets. The declaration will also specify the proposed transmission hosting capacity within such a zone and preferred transmission corridor and other matters. Hence, the analysis carried out by the CEO VicGrid for the Victorian Transmission Plan will also inform Ministerial declarations. Declarations will also be subject to consultation with industry and consumers and declarations will be published with reasons.

*Collaboration with the Australian Energy Market Operator*

Fifth, the Bill requires that the CEO VicGrid cooperate with the Australian Energy Market Operator in performing their respective functions.

*Landholder payments*

Sixth, the Bill provides for payments to landholders who host new transmission infrastructure through a scheme of annual payments for 25 years. The Bill provides for the criteria for eligible landholders to be prescribed in regulations. This will include landholders of private land hosting new easements for transmission infrastructure. In addition to such private land holders, eligibility will include holders of certain rights and interests with respect to Crown land hosting new transmission infrastructure to be prescribed in regulations.

The payments are designed to facilitate the development of new transmission infrastructure and are in addition to any compensation that landholders are entitled to under the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*.

The framework will require ongoing payments of certain amounts, to be calculated in accordance with formulae in the Bill or to be prescribed in regulations, for 25 years, from registration of the easement and provides for the determination of eligibility and recovery of overpayments and administration of payments. Persons who are determined ineligible and are dissatisfied will also have an avenue of appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

*Cost recovery*

Seventh, the Bill enables recovery of the CEO VicGrid's costs from end users through transmission use of system charges. VicGrid's costs will arise in developing the Victorian Transmission Plan and facilitating and enabling high priority transmission projects, and fees and charges for the recovery of VicGrid's costs will be determined in consultation with the Premier, Treasurer and the Minister.

*Other amendments*

Finally, the Bill integrates the reforms into the existing national electricity planning framework. It also extends the time for the review of ministerial powers under section 16Y of the *National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005* to facilitate the procurement of major transmission infrastructure projects.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:57): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 20 March.**

**National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024***Statement of compatibility*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:58): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, 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 purpose of the Bill is to apply, with modifications, the retailer of last resort scheme in the National Energy Retail Law. The National Energy Retail Law is contained in the schedule to the *National Energy Retail Law (South Australia) Act 2011*.

The retailer of last resort scheme is the mechanism that facilitates the orderly transfer of customers from the failed retailer to a new retailer to prevent disruption of electricity or gas supply to those customers.

The Bill also revokes the existing retailer of last resort provisions in the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the *Gas Industry Act 2001*, and makes other minor and technical amendments to those Acts.

#### Application of non-Victorian Law

Part 2 of the Bill applies in Victoria parts of the National Energy Retail Law contained in the schedule to the *National Energy Retail Law (South Australia) Act 2011* and the regulations under the National Energy Retail Law. Clause 4 of the Bill provides that the applicable NERL provisions, as modified by regulations to be made under the Bill after its passage, apply as a law of Victoria and may be referred to as the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria), and apply as if they were part of Bill. Clause 5 applies the regulations made under the National Energy Retail Law as regulations in force in Victoria.

The ‘applicable NERL provisions’ are provisions of the National Energy Retail Law relating to the retailer of last resort scheme, and other provisions to give effect to that scheme.

As the Bill will apply parts of the National Energy Retail Law as Victorian law, the human rights impacts are addressed in this statement of compatibility.

#### Human Rights Issues

The Bill imposes obligations on energy retailers, regulators and other participants in the national energy framework. Section 6(1) of the Charter provides that only persons have human rights. A person is defined as a natural person. Although it is possible that an energy retailer, regulator or participant could be a natural person, in practice, energy retailers, regulators and other participants are corporate entities.

However, the retailer of last resort scheme has provisions impacting upon customers, which can include natural persons. The human rights issues identified below primarily relate to those persons.

The following human rights protected by the Charter are relevant for the Bill: the right to privacy, freedom of expression, property rights and rights in criminal proceedings.

The National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 adopts parts of the National Energy Retail Law that engage these human rights under the Charter. The adopted parts will be referred to in this Statement of Compatibility as being the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria).

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified having regard to the factors in section 7(2) of the Charter.

#### Right to privacy

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 privacy will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed and will not be arbitrary provided it is reasonable in the circumstances and just and appropriate to the end sought.

Section 11 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 provides that regulations can be made to provide for the disclosure of information (including confidential and personal information) between regulators, where that information relates to a retailer of last resort event.

Section 149 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) is an overarching provision stipulating that Division 7 (which pertains to providing of information) does not limit the information the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) may require a failed retailer or insolvency official to provide to AEMO in relation to a retailer of last resort event, including customer details.

Sections 151–154 and 156 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) permit the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) to issue a ‘retailer of last resort regulatory information notice’ to require a retailer to provide information about, amongst other matters, the customers of a failed retailer. This notice can be issued in connection with a retailer of last resort event, or with the exercise of the AER’s powers. The provisions provide that the information can include names, contact details, billing addresses, whether a customer is a life support customer and debit arrangements. The retailer may be required to provide this information to the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), the AER, registered retailers of last resort or electricity distributors. It is intended that by amendments given effect by regulations, that the information can also be provided to the Essential Services Commission.

Section 157 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) provides that the AER can share information it has received from a regulatory information notice with the AEMO, distributors of electricity, designated retailers of last resort and any other person that the AER considers necessary. It is intended that by amendment to this section given effect by regulations, that the AER will also be able to share this information with the Essential Services Commission.

Section 174 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) also provides that, to the extent that information is personal information within the *Privacy Act 1988* of the Commonwealth, sharing or use of that information in connection with the retailer of last resort scheme between the AER, AEMO, distributors and designated retailers of last resort is authorised. It is intended that by amendment to this section given effect by regulations, that information can also be shared by the Essential Services Commission and that reference will be made to the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

Sections 206–214, 216 and 220 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) empower the AER to require a person to provide information or documents, enable the disclosure of that information in certain circumstances and enable the AER to use information obtained under the Law or the National Energy Retail Rules to perform a function or power. Section 268 empowers the Australian Energy Market Commission to publish information received in relation to a proposed change to the National Energy Rules. Other sections of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) also relate to the collection and sharing of information that may include private information.

Accordingly, the right to privacy is engaged.

The collection and sharing of information is to ensure the continuity of the sale of energy to customers, and to enable the AER and other regulatory bodies to undertake their regulatory functions. The provisions ensure important information about customers is available to all relevant entities following a retailer of last resort event, including, for example, whether a customer is a life support customer. The collection, use and disclosure of information are clearly defined and subject to a number of parameters. The provisions relating to information clearly set out in which circumstances they operate.

In addition, a similar information-sharing regime in relation to the sharing of customer information in a retailer of last resort event was included in the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and the *Gas Industry Act 2001*. That regime has been revoked by the Bill. Therefore, the amendments do not impose any limitations on the right to privacy in Victoria.

Further, the Essential Services Commission is a public entity within the meaning of the *Public Administration Act 2004* and is bound by the requirements of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and must ensure that any collection, use or disclosure of information is undertaken in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles set out in Part 3 of that Act. Similarly, the AER is bound by section 44AF of the *Consumer and Competition Act 2010* of the Commonwealth.

These provisions engage the privacy right but do not limit it because they are logical, rational, reasonable and proportionate to the purpose to ensure the continuity of the sale of energy to customers, and to enable the AER and other regulatory bodies to undertake their regulatory functions.

Accordingly, in my view, these provisions are not an arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy and therefore do not limit that right.

#### Freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression. Section 15(3) of the Charter provides that special duties and responsibilities are attached to the right to freedom of expression and that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights of other persons and for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Sections 158 and 206 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) make it an offence for a person to provide false or misleading information in purported compliance with a retailer of last resort regulatory information notice, or a relevant notice issued by the AER. This may engage a person's right to freedom of expression.

However, section 158 is reasonably required to ensure that information collected by that notice is correct and that the bodies receiving that information can reasonably rely on the truthfulness of the information provided. Section 206 is reasonably required to enable AER to perform its regulatory functions. In addition, section 160 protects legal professional privilege, and section 161 provides for a protection against self-incrimination. Section 206 provides for similar protections.

For this reason, to the extent that the right to freedom of expression is engaged, the impacts are reasonable and necessary to enable the retailer of last resort scheme to operate effectively.

#### Property rights

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.

As a contractual right could be considered a property right, sections 140 and 141 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) may engage this right. Section 140 provides that the customer of a failed retailer ceases to be a customer of the failed retailer and becomes a customer of the retailer of last resort. Section 141 sets out that the contract for sale of energy between the customer and failed retailer is terminated in that circumstance.

The termination of a contract may deprive a person of their property rights in relation to that contract. However, the deprivation of property is confined to the circumstances set out in these sections. Any deprivation is for the legitimate purpose of ensuring continuity of the sale of energy to that customer.

Therefore, any deprivation of property would be in accordance with the law and do not limit property rights under the Charter.

#### Criminal rights

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

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

#### 'Reasonable excuse' offence provisions

Sections 161 and 206 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) introduce offence provisions that contain 'reverse onus' elements. By creating 'reasonable excuse' exceptions, these offences in the Bill place an evidential burden on the accused, in that it requires the accused to raise evidence as to a reasonable excuse. However, in doing so, this offence does not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the essential elements of the offence.

I do not consider that an evidential onus such as this limits the right to be presumed innocent, and courts in other jurisdictions have taken this approach.

Section 159 provides that a person must not refuse to comply with a retailer of last resort regulatory information notice on the ground of any duty of confidence. Section 206 provides that it is not a 'reasonable excuse' to refuse to provide information to the AER on the grounds of a duty of confidence. Section 321 provides that if an individual has a privilege against self-exposure to a penalty, they are not excused from providing information, a document, evidence or answering a question. These sections may limit the protection against self-incrimination. However, these limitations are required to enable relevant information to be collected and shared so that the AER and other bodies can perform their functions and duties, including ensuring the continuity of the sale of energy. There are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling access to this information. Finally, section 159 and section 206 provide that a person, by complying with a notice, bears no liability for breach of contract, confidence or a civil wrong. The Bill also provides for other avenues for granting of relief from liability.

For these reasons, I consider that these provisions are unlikely to limit the right to protection against self-incrimination. However, to extent that that any limitation is imposed, that limitation is reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter.

#### Accessory liability of officers of body corporate for offences

Section 304 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) provides that officers of a body corporate to be liable if the body corporate commits an offence by contravening breach provisions of the National Energy Retail Law, if the officer knowingly authorised or permitted the contravention or breach. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

This provision is relevant to the presumption of innocence as it may operate to deem as 'fact' that an individual has committed an offence based on the actions of another body, based on their association with that body. However, it is my view that the right is not limited in this context.

Section 304 provides that the relevant person only taken to commit the offence committed by the corporation if the person knowingly authorised or permitted the commission of the offence. In my view, these provisions do not limit the presumption of innocence as the prosecution is still required to prove the accessory elements of the offence – that is, that the relevant person knowingly authorised or permitted the commission of the offence.

In the event that this provision is considered a limit, I am of the view that any limitation is reasonably justified. As with any regulated industry concerning essential services to the public, such as energy, there is a strong need to ensure adequate deterrence of regulatory offences that may cause harm to industry participants or the public at large. Courts in other jurisdictions have held that the presumption of innocence may be subject to reasonable limits in the context of regulatory compliance. These provisions only target persons who have

elected to undertake a position as an officer of a body corporate, which includes assuming the responsibilities and duties that apply to that role, and who have the capacity to influence the conduct of the entity concerned.

The provisions ensure such persons are appropriately held responsible for all breaches that occur by or on behalf of the entity in which they have responsibility for, enabling offences to be successfully prosecuted and operate as an effective deterrent. Affected persons should be well aware of the regulatory requirements and, as such, should have the necessary processes and systems in place to effectively meet these requirements and not incur accessorial liability. In my view, there is no less restrictive way of ensuring accountability of officers of bodies corporate for breaches of the Bill, and it follows that these provisions are compatible with the Charter.

#### Penalty provisions

The Bill also repeals certain provisions relating to civil penalties in the *Electricity Industry Act 2001* and the *Gas Industry Act 2000*. This amendment does not affect any Charter rights.

The National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) will also introduce a limited range of civil penalty provisions relating to the retailer of last resort scheme, and compliance by regulated entities (relating to sections 143, 156, 274, 276 and 282).

The imposition of civil penalties will generally not engage the right under sections 24 (fair hearing) or 25 (presumption of innocence) or 26 (Right not to be tried or punished more than once) the Charter, unless the penalty is in the nature of a punishment. Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which he or she has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This rule only applies in respect of criminal punishment. The principle does not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa. The imposition of civil penalties will not, generally, engage the right, unless the penalty is in the nature of a 'punishment', or a penal consequence. To the very limited extent that these civil penalties apply to a natural person, the penalties and the powers of the Court to make orders set out in section 291 serve the purpose of ensuring that a person upholds their duties in a retailer of last resort scenario in relation to information notices. I consider the maximum civil penalty appropriate and not disproportionate given the central role these persons play in the regulatory scheme. Furthermore, the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) provides that the breach of a civil penalty provision is not an offence. These provisions are largely protective in nature, with the aim of ensuring compliance with the regulatory scheme.

Accordingly, I conclude that the penalties attaching to these provisions are civil in nature and thus do not engage this Charter right.

A natural person may have a criminal penalty amount imposed on them if they breach section 158 or 206 of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria). To the extent that section 24 or 25(2) of the Charter is engaged by these sections, I do not consider the rights to be limited. A criminal proceeding will be heard by a competent court of relevant jurisdiction and the person entitled to the minimum guarantees. I consider the maximum criminal penalty appropriate and not disproportionate given the central role these persons play in the regulatory scheme. The extent to which section 25(1) of the Charter is engaged is addressed above.

#### Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**Hon Lily D'Ambrosio**  
**Minister for Energy and Resources**

#### *Second reading*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:59): 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 Bill is an essential piece of legislation that will enhance protections for Victorian consumers and strengthen the resilience of the energy retail market. This Bill marks a significant step towards safeguarding the interests of energy consumers in the face of an evolving and, at times, challenging energy landscape.

The Bill adopts the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria, provided for in the National Energy Retail Law. The retailer of last resort scheme is a key consumer safeguard designed to transfer customers to

alternative energy retailers should their current provider fail in the market. The scheme ensures customers continue to receive electricity and/or gas supply without disruption.

In any efficient competitive market, market exit is a natural occurrence. However, in essential services like electricity and gas, it is crucial to have well-functioning exit arrangements in place to ensure uninterrupted energy supply to customers. The scheme serves as the primary regulatory mechanism for dealing with market exits, quickly transferring customers of failed retailers to another retailer to avoid disruption to their energy supply.

While Victoria has had its own successful retailer of last resort scheme since 2007, recent energy market instability has prompted us to assess the scheme's suitability. Over the past year alone, there have been a total of nine retailer failures across the east coast electricity and gas markets, including four in Victoria. Factors such as the surge in wholesale gas and electricity prices, coupled with unexpected global events like the war in Ukraine, have added substantial strain on our retailers.

Recognising the need to enhance the scheme, the Bill proposes the adoption of the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria. This national scheme, already operational in several jurisdictions, provides a uniform framework for managing retailer failures, ensuring consistency and reducing the risk of unintended consequences for customers.

The Bill will provide the Australian Energy Regulator with the power to direct the failed retailer's gas contracts and supply to the retailer that takes on the failed retailer's customers. This ensures that the retailer has the necessary gas to service a larger customer base. This provision addresses a crucial gap in Victoria, where the Essential Services Commission does not have equivalent powers in Victoria and the Victorian retailers of last resort are at risk of having insufficient capacity to service their new customers.

The Bill also allows for the transfer of affected customers to multiple retailers, minimising the disruptive impact across the community and energy market. This stands in contrast to the current Victorian scheme, which does not allow additional retailers to be appointed after an event, placing undue pressure on a single retailer.

The Bill provides better financial protection for affected customers of a retailer of last resort event. Unlike the current one-time fee imposed on customers of failed retailers in Victoria, the Bill spreads costs across a wider consumer base, mitigating the impact on those unexpectedly affected by the aftermath of a retailer failure.

Lastly, by adopting the national retailer of last resort scheme, amendments made to the scheme will automatically apply in Victoria. On 12 August 2022, the Australian Energy Market Commission proposed recommendations to Energy Ministers, aiming to enhance the national RoLR scheme and address crises and the risk of market participant failure. These changes are proposed to commence in 2024. The reforms considered include expanding the Australian Energy Regulator's powers to direct gas storage supply to the designated retailer of last resort; coordinated crisis management approaches informed by scenario planning; and introducing the option for small customers of a failed retailer to be transferred to a market retail contract, which offers competitive prices.

Unlike in other jurisdictions where energy retail laws are regulated by the National Energy Retail Law and monitored by the Australian Energy Regulator, Victoria maintains its own regulatory framework enforced by the Essential Services Commission. Victoria has some of the strongest energy consumer protections in the country and these will continue.

While the Australian Energy Regulator will regulate the National Energy Retail Law retailer of last resort arrangements to be introduced by the Bill, the rest of the energy retail laws will still be overseen by the Essential Services Commission under Victorian legislation.

Some of the retailer of last resort scheme in the National Energy Retail Law will need to be modified to ensure that the provisions operate consistently with the Victorian energy retail framework and terms are defined consistently with how they are used in the Victorian framework. These modifications will be effected by regulations made under the Bill.

As we navigate both the opportunities and the challenges posed by the shift towards clean energy, the Bill acknowledges the potential disruption to energy retailers. The increasing adoption of clean and distributed energy generation, including household solar photovoltaics and batteries, will decrease the amount of supply purchased from retailers, leading to reduced revenue and likely increase the market exits of smaller retailers with marginal profitability. Strategic planning and proactive measures are therefore essential to ensure the financial stability of retailers in a transforming energy market.

In conclusion, the Bill introduces a clear and robust scheme that ensures well-functioning exit arrangements, which are crucial for maintaining an uninterrupted energy supply to consumers and protecting retailers from cascading retail failures.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:59): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 20 March.**

### **Statute Law Revision Bill 2024**

#### *Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (11:00): I am delighted to have half an hour to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, because nothing is more important in Victoria today than fixing up typos in legislation. Lucky there is no cost-of-living crisis, lucky there is no housing crisis, lucky there is no youth crime crisis – the most important thing is typographical errors in statutes, so here we are.

On a semiserious note, it actually does say a fair bit about this government's legislative priorities when we have so many serious issues confronting us as a state and they choose to fill up their legislative program with typo corrections. As somebody who my current and former staff, if they are listening to this, know to be a grammar pedant – and 'pedant' is probably the polite term; there is probably another word that they would use which is not quite parliamentary – I am a big one for saying, 'Yes, let's get things right. Let's get things correct. Let's not have typographical errors, grammatical errors or punctuation errors if we can avoid it.'

Let us have a look at what this bill does. What it does is make minor amendments to a number of acts to correct grammatical and typographical errors, to update references and for other similar purposes. If we have a look at the list of some of the acts that are being amended, we have got amendments here in relation to the Gas Industry Act 2001. Now, with a lot of issues facing Australia and Victoria in particular at the moment in relation to gas, I might have thought that amendments to the gas act could have gone a little bit further than simply correcting typos in it. I note that today – I think it is in both the *Australian* and the *Age* – there is an article saying:

One of Australia's largest appliance manufacturers has blamed Victoria's gas policy for the closure of its Albury factory, sending a ... message that the ... plan will cost consumers dearly.

It quotes the group managing director Jon Seeley, of Seeley International, as saying:

The accelerated disruption to our industry caused by the Victorian government's inexcusable anti-gas obsession, and using taxpayers' money to pay consumers to replace Australian-made gas heaters with imported reverse cycle systems, is extremely detrimental ...

So we have Victorians losing jobs, Victorians living in Wodonga losing jobs at the Seeley factory, which is to close down and be moved to South Australia, and what does the owner of the company say is the reason for it? It is 'the Victorian government's inexcusable anti-gas obsession'. I would have thought that that is a far more appropriate thing to be looking at amending the Gas Industry Act over, rather than correcting a typo or changing a comma to a semicolon here or there. When we see Victorians losing jobs because policy decisions of this government are driving jobs out of this state, it makes absolutely no sense at all.

I think the quote I just read was in the *Age* newspaper. The same story was reported in the *Australian*. I thought the director of Seeley International made a very good point. He said:

We believe in the importance of gas in the clean energy transition and recognise the need to plot a sensible path away from fossil fuels, including natural gas.

But a premature exit from gas, without viable alternatives and credible solutions, is entirely reckless and will end up costing consumers the most.

And he is absolutely right. It is important that –

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I do realise that with this sort of legislation, which makes minor amendments to grammatical errors and dots and dashes in different acts, it is hard to keep comments strictly to the bill and I think it is fair for people to maybe expand a little bit on some of the bills that are proposed to be amended, but I think it is fair to say that the member for Malvern is now straying into a policy debate, quoting people on a policy issue that has no relevance to this particular bill before the Parliament.

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

**Michael O'BRIEN:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I would note that there is a longstanding tradition in this place that the lead speaker for the opposition gets a certain amount of latitude in relation to these matters. I might be using that latitude, but it is there to be used.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** I think at the beginning of this debate I will allow some of this wideranging debate –

**A member:** To some.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** to some – and we will see how we go.

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Correct, member for Gippsland East. I have not even started bagging the government yet. The Gas Industry Act is an important act, but it does show that decisions made by governments in relation to gas do have real-world consequences. The quote I have just put on the record from the director of Seeley International Jon Seeley shows that he is not ignoring the fact that we do need to transition, but he is quite rightly pointing out and questioning the way in which this government is seeking to go about it. And the way in which this government is seeking to go about it, which is with an anti-gas policy, is simply going to cost money, cost jobs and ultimately cost the environment.

I can say this as a former energy minister: Victoria's electricity supply is still overwhelmingly coal-based, so if you replace natural gas with coal-fired electricity, that is worse for the environment, right? I am happy for anybody to contradict me, but if you are simply replacing natural gas with coal-fired electricity, that leads to higher emissions and is worse for the environment. Possibly the minister is going to contradict me. It would be very welcome to hear him do it.

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I renew my earlier point of order. I respect your ruling – I think it was a good ruling – but the member for Malvern is now straying into a substantive policy debate about energy policy, which has really no bearing on the bill before the house.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant):** I will bring the member back to the bill. If we can continue to keep closely to it, that will assist with the rest of the debate.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** We will do our best, Acting Speaker. No promises, but we will do our best. I see that one of the other acts that is being amended here is the EastLink Project Act 2004. It brought to mind that I was driving down EastLink the other day. It is a great road, EastLink, but every time I get that little beep on my e-tag it does remind me that this was supposed to be a toll-free road. I remember the Bracks government promising that EastLink would be toll-free, and that did not quite

happen. It is quite perturbing that every single time somebody drives down EastLink – which of course is facilitated by the EastLink Project Act 2004, just to bring the debate back to the legislation before us – every time they hear that little beep it is a little audio reminder of the broken promise of the Labor government and what it costs Victorians.

Actually, I remember the last time I had Spotify on I was listening to a band called the Cheap Fakes, and I thought –

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Well, it is a very good Australian band. In fact I am disappointed the Deputy Speaker is not here, because he is a bit of an aficionado of Australian music.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael O'BRIEN:** No, I wasn't actually. Also, there is nothing cheap about the Labor Party's broken promises. They might be fake, but there is certainly nothing cheap about them.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael O'BRIEN:** It was not just an excuse to get the gag in about cheap fakes. Actually it is very good music. If you are into driving bass and big trumpets, there is a song called *Stoink*. At the risk of putting Molly Meldrum out of a job, it is a great track. *Sand on the Beach* is another great one, another great summer track. We are here supporting Australian music.

**Brad Rowswell** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Thank you very much. Only 20 minutes to go. Thank you very much, member for Sandringham; I appreciate that. That is fantastic. This could be a very long 20 minutes. I am happy to go through my musical tastes, if you like, but that would probably bore the house a little bit too much.

We also see the Heritage Act 2017 being amended. I say as the member for Malvern that I think I am very fortunate to represent an area where we do have some heritage properties, but obviously there is always going to be a tension between ensuring the adequate protection of heritage and making sure that we are able to get development where appropriate. I do think that is something that we need to get a better balance on.

I do recall that a few years ago some genius decided to try and put up the Eastern Freeway for heritage listing, which just struck me as being one of the absolute dumbest things I have seen in my life.

**Brad Rowswell** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** For their sake I will not name them, member for Sandringham, but as a former Bulleen boy who grew up driving up and down the Eastern Freeway all the time – it is a very functional freeway – the idea that it should be heritage listed is absolute nonsense. We do need to focus on what actually matters.

I saw there was a report in the *Age* recently about the Royal Exhibition Building, which is a fantastic building. It does bring back a few flashbacks from my days as a Melbourne Uni student, having to go to exams there – you always get that little shudder as you walk in. There are also a few memories. I think there were some Chocolate Appreciation Society balls held at the exhibition buildings as well. I remember going to see I think it was Johnny Diesel & The Injectors back in the early 1990s.

**A member** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** It is a walk down memory lane, absolutely. That is the sort of heritage that we do need to preserve. This Parliament has seen a lot of work gone into it – almost perpetual scaffolding up to try and make sure that the building is maintained in a safe way and that the heritage features of

it are protected. A lot of work went into the stairs out the front to make sure that water could not continue to get into them. We had to do that. It was our forefathers and foremothers – forebears – who actually had the insight to create some of the most amazing public buildings in the country. This is back in the 1850s and 1860s during –

**Juliana Addison** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Absolutely, member for Wendouree. We have got some amazing heritage buildings here created during the time of the gold rush. If our forebears had the foresight to create those sorts of amazing public buildings, it is our obligation as the current custodians to make sure they are kept in good repair. So I do ask the government: what is going to happen with the exhibition building? It was the site of our first Parliament. It was where the proclamation was made for the Commonwealth of Australia. It was actually the site of the Victorian Parliament for 27 years, because when the federal Parliament moved into here between 1901 and 1927, we bugged out and we moved to the exhibition buildings. It is a very important building. Given we are talking about the Heritage Act 2017, I think it is an appropriate time to discuss the need to preserve our heritage and make sure that it is handed on to the next generation in decent shape.

This bill amends the Safety on Public Land Act 2004 to remove a reference to another provision of that act which was repealed by the Sustainable Forests (Timber) and Wildlife Amendment Act 2014. 'Sustainable forests' is not a contradiction in terms, as much as some members of this place may seem to think so. I am very disappointed in the actions that this government has taken to bring to an end native timber logging in this state, because it is sustainable. It absolutely is sustainable. The amount of native timber which was available for harvesting at any given time is a tiny, tiny fraction of Victoria's estate of native timber. Most of it is preserved in national parks, state parks and other areas where it can never, ever be touched. Of those areas where it is available for harvesting, only a tiny fraction is available in any given year to provide an opportunity for it to be regenerated.

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Thank you, member for Gippsland East – 0.04 per cent. It is sustainable. When I see what this government is doing to kill off our native timber industry all in the name of climate change and economic protection, it makes me wonder: where do they think our hardwood is going to come from? We are still going to need hardwood. We are still going to need to build homes. We are still going to need furniture and floorboards. The fact is if we do not harvest that timber ourselves in an environmentally sensible and careful way, we will simply be importing that material from other countries. I fear the countries we import that material from will not have the same environmental rigour and standards and protections that we have here in Victoria.

It is a very shortsighted viewpoint to say, 'We're going to protect the environment in our own little patch,' which I do not believe the government is actually doing. As I say, our native hardwood harvesting has been extremely sustainable. But even if you were to accept the premise of their argument that we are going to improve protections here in Victoria by bringing an end to native timber harvesting, to say then we are going to simply import all of our needs from other countries with far, far worse records makes no sense. Either the environment is a global issue or it is not. Either climate change is a global issue or it is not. The idea that we can simply turn our backs on the consequences of our actions in other parts of the world and the effects that they will have ultimately on environments in other countries and climate change more broadly is nonsense.

I do think that while we are amending the Safety on Public Land Act 2004 to remove a reference to another provision of that act which was repealed by the Sustainable Forests (Timber) and Wildlife Amendment Act 2014, it is a timely opportunity to just once again question why this government seems to be so hell-bent on ending native timber harvesting here in Victoria when it is done sustainably, it is done safely and it is done in an ecologically sensitive way. At the end of the day all it means is that we will be getting our timber from places like Malaysia, Indonesia and other places

which, with the best will in the world, I do not think any member here would say have the same rigour when it comes to environmental standards that we have here in Victoria.

The government through this bill seeks to repeal mistakenly duplicated items in the tables in sections 56 and 56B of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. I am not sure whether when the government passed the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act in 2007 they realised the greatest beneficiaries of that act would be Telstra and Optus, because with the amount of calls I get from people trying to flog me various allegedly free energy upgrades – you could start to pay down some of Victoria's debt if you could actually monetise some of that, member for Gippsland East. It has got to the stage where I am very nervous about answering my phone these days. If I do not know the number, I am very nervous about answering the phone. In fact the other day I had an unknown to me number flash up on the mobile phone. I answered it but was quite quiet in doing so, because I was waiting for the click to come on the other end and the call centre operator to start their pitch. Then the answer came down the other end of the line: 'Michael, it's Jacinta.' It was the Premier. So there you go: I had mistaken the Premier for a call operator trying to flog me energy upgrades, but in fact she wanted to discuss something else. Anyway, I have now got her number, which is a positive thing.

I have no objection to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act at all. The only question is: how efficiently are we meeting those targets? That is the real question. Are we actually doing it efficiently? If we just continually throw good money after bad by paying people to try and flog energy upgrade products to people that do not really want them, I do question how effective that is. Yes, we all believe in energy efficiency, but can we possibly find a more efficient way to deliver on that energy –

**Darren Cheeseman** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Thank you, whip. Sorry, you are not the whip anymore. I beg your pardon. Sorry, parliamentary secretary. I thought, 'Do I go onto the do-not-call list in relation to those matters?' But I thought, 'No, because there are charities I actually want to hear from and others, so I will continue playing Russian roulette.' But, yes, I think the Premier was a bit surprised when she got a very brusque answer from me the other day. Anyway, it is all sorted. I will put her number into my phone now so that that will not happen again.

We see the Docklands Act 1991 being amended by this Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. Every time I go down to Docklands, which is not that often – I go to a few games at Marvel Stadium; I must admit I much prefer going to see my footy at the G rather than Marvel, but there are times you do not have a choice – it is still missing something. I know that this government has done a deal with the AFL and provided a significant amount of funding to the AFL in relation to the Docklands Stadium and also to the AFL headquarters. In fact we still have not been able to find out what the value of the peppercorn rent was that Treasurer Pallas gave away to the AFL for their property down there. We have not been able to find out what the actual value of that was.

I saw in the paper last week that we are up for a horror budget. I saw we are up for potentially looking at cuts to community sport, which I am very concerned about. I think that every member here would appreciate how important community sport is in their local areas. We know it is something that encourages physical fitness, we know it is something that is good for people's mental health, we know it builds a sense of team and we know it is something that creates a real sense of community. If this government is looking at cutting community sport in order to meet its budget problems, then I think the government needs to look harder and look again. For a government that can give literally billions of dollars to the AFL – and I love my footy like everyone else – in either actual grants or peppercorn rent or other concessions when the AFL does not actually pay tax, and if the government is at the same time looking to cut funding to community sport, I do have to say that that is –

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Something is wrong, member for Gippsland East, something is very, very wrong. That is not where we should be going at all, so I will be looking at this budget very carefully,

as I am sure everyone in this place will and Victorians will. But it says a lot about it. I say this as a former Treasurer: budgets are about choices; budgets are about priorities. You would love to be able to fund everything, you would love to be able to tax nobody – that is not an option if you want to put a budget together. But budgets do reflect the priorities of the government. If the priorities of this government are to cut funding to community sport, then this government has got the wrong priorities. So I hope that was an erroneous article in the newspaper. All will be revealed, no doubt, on state budget day in May, but it is a very concerning sign.

This bill also makes various updates to the Road Safety Act 1986. Road safety is something where Victoria has long been a leader in the field, although obviously in recent years we have seen a very troubling uptick in the number of people whose lives have been lost through the road toll. I am sure there are various reasons for that. The state of our roads I think will play a part. You would think that we should be seeing a reduction in the road toll given the improvement in safety and safety technology in cars, but we are not seeing that at the moment.

I do think that one of the things the government has got wrong, with respect, is the abolition of the road safety committee. For many years this Parliament had a dedicated road safety committee.

**Tim Bull** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** A very effective committee, member for Gippsland East. In fact I am pretty sure it was that road safety committee that was the genesis of Victoria being the first state in the country to have mandatory seatbelt laws, and I think it certainly had something to do with the rollout of random breath tests, which again Victoria was a leader on. The genesis of many road safety initiatives in this state that made us a leader for so many years was the road safety committee, and I thought it was a really backward step when Premier Andrews, as he then was, after the 2018 election decided to abolish it. I could not understand the rationale. I do not understand how anyone benefits from abolishing a road safety committee, because it is something that does affect so many of our lives. It is something that Victoria was a leader on, and now that is gone. I am not drawing a direct link to saying that because the government got rid of the road safety committee we have seen the road toll increase, but I do not think it helped, and I would urge the government to reconsider. We have got a new Premier now – a newish Premier – and I would urge the Premier to reconsider that decision. I think that reinstating a standalone dedicated and focused road safety committee in this Parliament could do a lot of good in terms of identifying problems and proposing solutions. As we know, not every parliamentary committee's ideas are taken up by every government all the time, but it is an important enough issue that we should be putting it on the table, and I do think that abolishing that committee was very much a retrograde step.

This bill updates the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 as well to reflect a change in the definition of 'building practitioner'. We have seen a lot of issues in the domestic building sector in this state in recent months in particular, and pleasingly I note that the government has today announced that it is going to be extending to the customers of Montego Homes the support that has been previously provided to customers of other home builders who have gone into liquidation. I am not quite sure why it took so long. I commend Evan Mulholland, Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability in the other place, who has been out there calling for this. The government does have a role in this. We have laws in place that say you cannot take on a contract unless you have actually got the insurance in place. The government has a regulator that should be ensuring that those laws are complied with. When somebody breaks the law, yes, that business or that person is obviously responsible. But when the government holds itself out as being a regulator, when the government holds itself out as being somebody that says, 'We're actually going to make sure these laws are enforced,' and then they are not enforced, the government bears and shares responsibility as well. So I do not think it was unreasonable for us to call for the extension of that policy of support to the customers of Montego Homes in the way it was provided to the customers of other home builders that have gone into liquidation recently. These people are going through enough. The last thing they need on top of everything else is the thought that they will have lost their deposits because insurance was not taken

out and because the government regulator failed to ensure that the insurance policy was taken out as required by law.

This bill also amends the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994, and I say, looking at the member for Gippsland East, that I have really got nothing to say about that because I would rather defer to experts in the field. Not too much livestock gets impounded around the streets of Malvern and Armadale, I can assure the member of that, so I might leave that particular act to others who know it a little bit better than do I.

We have also got some changes to the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013. We have obviously seen through some recent tragic cases why it is important to have strict regulation when it comes to heavy vehicle transport. There is that matter which I believe is still before the courts, so I will be very careful in what I say, but the Eastern Freeway tragedy which saw the tragic loss of the lives of four police officers is still playing out through the courts at the moment. It is important that we do have laws and that those laws are properly enforced. Any vehicle can be a lethal weapon, but a heavy vehicle is very, very much a dangerous missile in the wrong hands, or in the hands of somebody who is fatigued or under the influence of drugs or alcohol or who is otherwise impaired. So anything we can do to improve safety in those areas is very important.

I should say that the opposition does not oppose this bill. I did think about making a request to see if we could go into consideration in detail to debate this clause by clause, but the government has been so reluctant to have that sort of scrutiny I thought I would not even waste my breath. I am not even going to waste my breath in seeking to go into consideration in detail on this. Of course if I had actually requested it the government might have actually agreed to this one just to make me sweat through it all. But we do need to get things right. While this may not be the most important and the most pressing policy issue facing this Parliament and facing the people of Victoria – and it is certainly not in fact, for reasons I have outlined at the start – it is worth fixing mistakes. It is worth getting things right.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** On that basis – member for South-West Coast, I appreciate your support here – I could go for an extension of time, but I will not. I commend the bill to the house.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (11:30): It is a pleasure to join this debate. At the outset can I say I agree with the member for Malvern that this is a pretty straightforward, dots-and-dashes sort of bill. I will run through some of the acts that are being amended in a very minor way as part of this contribution. Can I just say: what a contribution from the member for Malvern. I am not being too political about this, but with the current dramas on that side of the house around leadership, I think people would look at that contribution and say, 'Look at what we're missing out on here.' There was contemporary music – fantastic. There was a bit of humour. There were some serious policy interjections in there. It was a real tour de force from the member for Malvern. I tell you what, I reckon his leadership stocks are right up there now after that performance – a very good performance, I thought, in this chamber today. He has taken a very straightforward bill and given us a lot of entertainment, and I think the Liberal party room could reflect on that and have a think about how they could bring him back.

The bill, as I said, is a dots-and-dashes bill. I requested to speak on this bill because usually in these sorts of statute law revision bills there is a bit of interesting material to talk about and there are some historic pieces of legislation that are being amended or something that touches on a bill in your portfolio areas where you think, 'That's a really interesting change, even if it's minor by nature.' This is literally some commas, some semicolons and some brackets being removed. But there are important bills in this legislation that are being amended, and I think it is worth just having a quick reflection on those. The member for Malvern in his contribution talked about the very minor change of a word in the Building Act 1993. The word 'pools' is being changed to the word 'pool' – a very minor change. Of course he mentioned that the Building Act is a really important piece of legislation, as is the

Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, and the member reflected on an announcement that was made today around those people that have been affected by the collapse of Montego Homes.

It is worth also just putting on the record the strong performance of this government in delivering its housing statement initiatives whilst swimming against very strong currents heading in the wrong direction at a national level in terms of the cost of building materials and the cost of labour. The building sector across the country is facing very difficult conditions. Certainly we would like to see more dwelling approvals and starts than we are currently now. The policy initiatives that we are putting in place are giving Victorians the very best chance of seeing housing growth and making sure that we are driving as much as we possibly can the development of more homes for Victorians. There has been a concentration on the most recent January figures from the ABS on dwelling approvals. It is worth noting, whilst we would like them to be much higher, that Victoria does lead the nation in the number of dwelling approvals. We are delivering more dwelling approvals, more homes, than any other state.

The bill also goes to the EastLink Project Act 2004 and again just changes I think a semicolon. The member for Malvern talked about the history of EastLink. That is going back a long, long, long way, I think back to the Bracks government. There was no mention of east–west link in that contribution, so I do not know whether the opposition have had a change of policy, whether they have forgotten about east–west link or whether it is still something that the opposition is really committed to. We will have to wait and see, I suppose.

The member for Malvern talked about the Gas Industry Act 2001 amendment. There are a few changes there to, again, just wording in that act. It is important to have these pieces of legislation corrected when we identify wording changes that need to be made or small corrections that need to be made. But in the area of gas and energy more generally we are so proud to be leading the nation in terms of our transition to renewable energy. We know that there are proposals from Liberals and Nationals around nuclear energy across the country. That was not mentioned in his contribution, and of course I think Victorians will be rightly very concerned about proposals to bring nuclear energy to Victoria, particularly models of nuclear energy that have not been proven.

The bill also goes to the Heritage Act 2017, the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013 and the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994 – again, all minor changes but important to be made. The Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009 is an important piece of legislation for government, which is rolling out a significant transport infrastructure program. I know in my part of the world the North East Link is being constructed at the moment. It will be a project that links the Eastern Freeway and completes the ring road from Greensborough down to the Eastern Freeway. There are benefits for that part of Melbourne in particular but more broadly for the eastern suburbs for transport and for industry. It will be great for our economy. It is a project that only this government has had the courage to take on and will deliver. On transport infrastructure – my area – as well, the stage 2 upgrade of the Hurstbridge train line is a fantastic project that has seen brand new stations built at Greensborough and Montmorency and a whole range of sections of track duplicated.

There are changes to the Safety on Public Land Act 2004; the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007, which I am sure other members might want to touch on; and the Docklands Act 1991, and I will just pause on this change. Again, it is a minor change but an important piece of legislation. There would be many people who would criticise the Kennett government for the way that it set up Docklands and the way that it proceeded. I am not in that camp. I think that it maybe could have been done better, but we have seen significant development of that part of Melbourne. It is worth reflecting on the fact that at the time that Docklands was envisaged it was effectively industrial wasteland on prime real estate. What we are seeing now is a precinct that has been significantly developed. We have seen over the last 25 years more than \$12 billion of private investment into that precinct, which is a great benefit for Victoria. It seems to be that in Melbourne we love three things: we love AFL footy, we love our coffee and we love having a crack at Docklands for some reason. I think the proof in the pudding for Docklands is that at a time when the real estate markets are tough and the cost of housing is tough, the demand for housing in Docklands is so strong. The development in Docklands is still

powering on. I think one thing that people do not realise is there is still significant availability of development potential in Docklands, and that is occurring right now. There are some 2500 to 3000 people working in construction in Docklands every year, so that is a rolling program of construction. It goes to I think the way that that precinct was envisaged and developed. Are there things that could have been better – absolutely. But I am a big supporter of that precinct. I think it is working well, and that is demonstrated by the number of people who want to live down there.

I was a bit surprised that the member for Malvern went to AFL football, being a Carlton supporter. I do look forward to round 2 when Collingwood unfurls the premiership flag at the MCG, as a Collingwood supporter – but I do not think he will be seeing the Carlton faithful waving that flag for some time to come. Just coming back to Docklands, I think Marvel Stadium works well in that particular area. I think the development that the member mentioned, the joint venture between Development Victoria and the AFL, will be a good one. Marvel Stadium is an important part of the AFL's infrastructure in terms of being able to play matches that are accessible to people in the city but also many other things, like concerts and performances and other events. Importantly, just before I finish off on Docklands, I point out that it is one of many of our precincts that are delivering housing right now or are in the pipeline to deliver housing in the near future.

This bill, as I said, is a pretty straightforward amendment and clean-up of the statute books, but it does touch on some really important pieces of legislation. As I say, just to finish off, I think the best part about today is we have seen the member for Malvern remind us why he probably would be the best person to be leading the Liberal Party. For some reason the other side of the house have not seen fit to keep him in that position.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (11:39): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. I also want to note the contributions before me. The previous speaker managed to make his full time, as did the member for Malvern – 30 minutes on this bill is quite outstanding, I think, because it really is a bill that predominantly fixes up mistakes, alters words and fixes a few grammatical errors on a whole range of acts. There are a few acts that I want to cover. There are the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994; the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013; the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, which you have heard from other speakers about; the Safety on Public Land Act 2004, which I will mention; and the Road Safety Act 1986.

If we start with the transport legislation where it repeals definitions that are no longer used, I can see that one of those would be 'safe roads in Victoria'. That would be a term that is no longer used, because we just cannot seem to find any safe roads in Victoria these days. Particularly in regional Victoria, that has gone out the window. It is not just my electorate of Ovens Valley, it is all through regional Victoria when we look at the state of our roads – seriously. The government have a responsibility to be fair and equitable. I think it is important that when it comes to maintenance we are not talking about infrastructure spend, we are not seeking new roads or new shiny things, we just want the maintenance on what we already have that was put there by our forebears. I can name many, many roads, whether it is the Murray Valley Highway, the Wangaratta-Whitfield Road, the Great Alpine Road, the Benalla-Tocumwal Road – the list just goes on in terms of the state these roads are in. As I said, safe roads in Victoria – that is a thing of the past.

I can just touch on that for a moment to explain the make-up of roads in country Victoria. Obviously you have got the road base, and those road bases are now built to a cost rather than built to a standard that they need to be. When you do not put good foundations in anything, whether it is a building or a road base, it comes back to bite you. And that is what is happening with our roads nowadays, because they are built to a cost rather than a standard. Then you have got the pavement, the bit that you drive on. Once that gets broken, it gets very difficult to come back from there. It turns a small problem into a much larger problem. Then you have got shoulders, and the shoulders are the side of the road where your car drops off the side. There can be a 10-centimetre drop-off with some of those – or more. People in a car or a truck think, 'Oh, well, that just happens,' but if you are riding a motorbike, I can tell you it is not a fun place to be when you go over one of those shoulders off to the edge. Adding to that, we

have got vegetation on the side of the roads – trees, limbs and native vegetation that then block the drains. When you block the drains, the ground gets soggy and the base gets wet, and before you know it the problem is exacerbated. Hence we have got the roads that we have today. While that water lingers in the drains it makes the whole base soggy. Then of course heavy vehicles going over that just compounds the problem. That is why we end up with the roads we have today, which are dangerous, deteriorated and in some cases a deathtrap. It is not just my roads, it is regional roads all through Victoria.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Tim McCURDY:** The member for South-West Coast will agree that down Warrnambool way there are plenty of roads that need work, as in my electorate and every other regional electorate as well.

I will also talk about the Safety on Public Land Act 2004. I have lived in Cobram since 1987 – 33 years. Cobram is on the mighty Murray, and just upstream of us is Yarrawonga. There is so much public land along the Murray River. It is fantastic for camping, fishing, birdwatching, koala-spotting and all sorts of other activities. But when we talk about the Safety on Public Land Act and access to those roads in the bush, I have never seen it so bad in my time, and others who are much older than me have said they have never seen the roads as bad as they are – and the tracks. Regardless of what vehicle you are trying to get in, whether it is a caravan, a car, a camp trailer or a pushbike – and heaven forbid you need to get a CFA truck in there or an ambulance because something has gone pear-shaped with a camper – some of these roads or tracks are impassable. And you are down to 5 kilometres an hour on some of those tracks. Again, the government has a responsibility to make sure that it is safe to get in and out of these places. We all want to use the bush. We want to use it responsibly, and it is being used responsibly.

Some of these roads and these tracks are only, like, 300 meters, 200 meters, off a sealed road or maybe up to a kilometre off a sealed road, but the track is an absolute disaster. Again, we are not trying to make a highway out of it. We are not trying to make it dual lane or sealed. We do not even need a load of gravel to fix the road. A grader would fix it, a road grader. If we had one start at Mildura and one start at Wodonga and they worked their way to the middle – a bit like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge, once they got there they could turn around and go back again – that would fix up a lot of those safety issues that we have. It really is a safety issue. People will make their way in there and then, if there is an emergency, it is very difficult to get CFA or ambulance in there. I spoke to an ARB specialist recently, and he loves it because he is selling more heavy-duty springs, lift kits and all-terrain tyres than he has ever sold before. Again, it is okay if you have got a four-wheel drive, but we should make our bush accessible to people in two-wheel drive vehicles. We encourage people from Melbourne to come up, enjoy what we have got on the Murray River, enjoy the fishing and camping and be responsible, as we are. But not all of them have got a four-wheel drive, and I think we have got a responsibility to make that safer for them as well.

In the short time I have got left I will also touch on the wildlife amendment act. I just spoke about Cobram through to Bundalong, and certainly some of the wildlife we have got along there, corellas and cockatoos, are absolutely destroying our native bush. It is absolutely beautiful native forest. Many people get to use it and enjoy it. But these corellas and cockatoos, if you could see the damage that they are doing to those trees, you would be amazed. You would be astounded. I know if a camper did that sort of damage to the trees, you would throw the book at them. Parks would throw the book at them, and I would support that because we want to make sure that our bush in our rural areas is kept up to speed so that everyone can use it – it is for all our enjoyment. But when you see the corellas and the cockatoos and the damage that they are doing, it really is a public nuisance. I think it is time that we start to look at solving some of these problems, not just pushing them under the carpet and saying they are somebody else's problems, because we are ruining our bush. As I said, if a camper did the same, you would throw the book at them.

I will also just touch on the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, which has been mentioned by others, and the Victorian government's aspiration of 800,000 houses in 10 years, or 80,000 a year. Housing is really holding us back in regional Victoria. I have got so many businesses that need more staff. Every business I walk into needs one or two or three or five more people, some more, and the fact is it is the housing that is holding them back from being able to get good staff into the regional areas. They cannot expand, and when they cannot expand, everything just goes a little bit dormant. If you are trying to get your kids into a school, you have got zones and child care, and these are the things that are holding us back. But the housing in particular is stopping good people in Melbourne, which is overflowing with people who want to come to the regions – and we want to invite them to the regions; we embrace that. But we need decent housing for that to happen, and I think it is something that we have to really take seriously.

The minister talked about targets yesterday, and I think it was said that you cannot live in a target or you cannot live in a housing statement. It is about actually getting on and building so we can support our local businesses. Regional Victoria, given the chance, can really kickstart Victoria's economy. The cost-of-living crisis is hurting everybody, whether you are in metro Melbourne or regional Victoria. But 25 per cent of Victorians live in regional Victoria, and I really think that the Labor government has taken its eye off the ball in building all these wonderful projects in Melbourne, some of which will never get used by 25 per cent of the Victorian population. At the same time we are going backwards in regional Victoria and we are missing opportunities. Certainly that housing aspect is one that I wanted to highlight.

There are a few other acts that I could cover, but I have run out of time. I think that this bill, although it is filled with grammatical errors and altered words, certainly does cover off on many acts.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (11:49): I too rise to talk about the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, which as has been stated does make a number of minor amendments to a number of acts to primarily correct grammatical and typographical errors. I think at the outset I just want to put on record my thanks to all of the various departments and their legislation divisions for actually being able to identify and find these errors within the various legislations.

It reminds me of when you are at university preparing major essays or theses and you read the paper so many times that you just miss what to the outside observer might be fairly simple grammatical errors. Often they do not get picked up by the word processor. Maybe artificial intelligence will help some of that and make it improve. In particular some of the typos will be picked up, but often the grammatical errors will not be picked up, and it may just be more of a figure of speech or if a bracket is missed or a comma is missed – even more so when you are talking about different documents. I know in the changes – I think it is in the Road Safety Act 1986 – there is a reference to 'Australian road or transport law' which is referred to in another piece of legislation which had been repealed I think about 10 years ago but had been missed from the Road Safety Act when the legislation was being fixed up. In the acts in force, particularly in the printed legislation, you do not have the advantage of having hyperlinks which can connect to all the other legislation that it references. So sometimes these errors do occur and you do need to have this process of clean-up. It would have been a thankless task for all of the departments that were trying to work through this process, so I do want put on record my thanks for the effort that they made.

I do want to just make a couple of comments in reflecting on the member for Malvern's terrific contribution. I think it was –

**A member:** Uplifting.

**Paul HAMER:** uplifting indeed – and a 30-minute performance that will definitely be appearing on his social media pages. I think the highlight for me was his reference to the Chocolate Appreciation Society at Melbourne Uni, a very esteemed institution. Looking back, it possibly was a front club for one of the political environments. I do not know.

**Michael O'Brien:** Not in my day.

**Paul HAMER:** I think, member for Malvern, we were probably there at a similar date. I do not know, but when I was there I did not assume it was a front club. But now, looking back, I do not know. I think More Beer was definitely a front club. But definitely I did enjoy my membership of the Chocolate Appreciation Society.

On some of the more serious matters that were raised, I think the member for Malvern said that this was not an important bill in the context of what else is happening in Victoria at the moment, and I would disagree with his assessment of that. I think it is always important that when these errors are discovered we do find a process to actually address them, and this is not being undertaken at the expense of other legislation and other policy; we can walk and chew gum at the same time. Indeed we look at the legislation program for this week: I mean, we are talking about changes to the private security industry, we have just debated changes to the WorkCover scheme, yesterday we talked about the State Electricity Commission and this afternoon we have got the matter of public importance on education. We can still fit all of those debates inside the sitting week.

I had a look at the speaking list, and I noticed that this bill has attracted more speakers from the opposition than probably any other piece of legislation for the entire year, so obviously it is striking a chord there and there are many members of the opposition who feel really strongly about this bill, and good on them. I will be in the chair shortly, and I will really welcome that time listening to all members' contributions on this bill.

Just in terms of a couple of specific changes and how they relate to acts and the importance of those acts, as has been referenced previously, the bill amends a section of the Docklands Act 1991 to insert a missing bracket. The Docklands Act is an important act – and I know that the member for Malvern had an issue in terms of some of the deals that have been done. Now, I probably am not quite as effusive as the minister was in his assessment of Docklands, but I would remind the member for Malvern that the original vision for the Docklands was quite different from the development plan that was then set out in the mid-1990s. The original one, which was I think set up at the time of the act, which was around 1991, was for a much lower rise, integrated development. And what has eventuated – and I do accept the minister's point that there has been since then an enormous amount of private development that has gone into Docklands – has also required a lot of after-the-fact investment in community facilities, because a lot of those community facilities had not been properly planned when the development plan came out in the mid-1990s, because it was all about getting the private sector and private development on board without the necessary community infrastructure that would be part of that as well.

I also want to talk about the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – the bill will remove a couple of duplicated items – particularly in relation to the Victorian energy upgrades program. I know the member for Malvern is now screening his calls, but hopefully he will not miss any future calls from the Premier. But I do want to remind him that the minister last year – the fantastic Minister for Climate Action – announced that we will be banning telemarketers from making calls under the VEU program. This followed, obviously, the government introducing a code of conduct to try and rein in some of the most egregious behaviour that we had seen from some providers – not all providers but some providers – in taking advantage of this program.

The program obviously is delivering enormous benefits for many, many people in the community, reducing their power bills as well as improving environmental outcomes, and luckily for the member for Malvern consultation is now open. There are currently three policy options on the table. One would ban cold-call telemarketing to all types of consumers and for all types of energy upgrades, option B is a combined telemarketing and doorknocking ban and option C is a phased telemarketing and doorknocking ban, which is the same as option B except for the timing of the bans. The second round of consultation closes at midnight on 18 March 2024, so, member for Malvern, you have still got a couple of weeks to get your –

**Michael O'Brien** interjected.

**Paul HAMER:** The member for Malvern would still like to have the option of doorknockers, which is fine. He is perfectly entitled – (*Time expired*)

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (11:59): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. As I said in the government business program about the legislative program this week, the government are out of ideas. This is a bill that is basically correcting typographical errors of various acts.

**A member** interjected.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Really, you dispute that? Well, this bill I think says it all. This literally corrects typographical errors in various acts, including the Building Act 1993, the Docklands Act 1991, the EastLink Project Act 2004, the Forests Act 1958, the Gas Industry Act 2001, the Heritage Act 2017, the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994 – it goes on and on and on. It is literally fixing the mistakes – dotting the t's and crossing the i's, as I often say it, or the other way around. But it is an opportunity to do things a bit better, and I would like to raise a few issues around some of these bills.

One of the bills, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, is to be amended to reflect changes to the definition of 'building practitioner'. We have seen a lot of upheaval in the building industry in the last few years, and consequently some of the legislation has resulted in changes. The government put through legislative changes that they were hoping would improve the situation for renters, but what we have actually seen is a lot less housing available for rent. Landlords are struggling to pay their mortgage and are selling their homes. The increase in the land tax bills has been one of those things, which is just starting to hit people's mailboxes at the moment. I actually had a phone call yesterday from a fellow who told me that his land tax bill had gone up from \$1600 per annum to \$5900 per annum, which is actually over \$100 per week. Now, what is that guy going to do, do you think? Let us say he has got a contract with a renter at the moment. This is a property in Port Fairy in South-West Coast. He told me it is a \$450-a-week rental property. He has got someone in there for the next three years. He is going to lose money and not be able to pay off the mortgage that he has on that property, or he has to sell the house rather than spending the next three years struggling and at a loss. Then in three years, if he is able to hang on to it, he is going to put the property rent up, and that is not going to be by the \$100 a week, because it accumulates. He has got to recoup the money that he has lost. I just do not understand how the government can see that as a way to improve the situation. We are seeing people lining up in the streets looking for a rental property and having to bargain. Rents are just going up and up, and it is purely because of the lack of balance that the government have been able to achieve with changes in the legislation that have done the exact opposite to what I imagine they were trying to do.

We have also got changes to the Road Safety Act 1986. In South-West Coast electorate roads are one of the biggest issues. People are really quite mobilised by the fact that the government are not spending the money in South-West Coast that they need to on maintenance. This is now extreme. We have got roads that are crumbling before people's eyes. The member for Ovens Valley has talked about drop-offs on the verges and shoulders of roads of about 10 centimetres. No – you go along the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road or the Noorat-Terang road and the drop-offs are 20 centimetres and more. When the roads are in such a state like this it is dangerous. We have got a road toll in Victoria that has escalated. Last year there were 295 deaths; that is a 22 per cent increase on the year before. Already this year we have got 50 people who have passed away – fatalities that have occurred on our roads in Victoria. The shocking part for regional Victoria is that that figure is 20 per cent higher for regional Victorians than it is for metropolitan Melbourne. That gives the impetus, surely, for the government to be actually investing in the roads in south-west Victoria, in regional Victoria, not the opposite. Companies like the road-building contractors are telling me that there is literally no pipeline of work that they able to tender for because there is nothing the government is putting forward to fix our roads or to even maintain them. There has to be just dangerous potholes.

I actually did an FOI recently on the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road asking them to give me an understanding of where they have fixed the road, because the minister did promise that she was going to do 5 kilometres of work. When I have driven along it there is 3 kilometres of work but there is nowhere that I can see the 5 kilometres, so I asked for the information. What I got was a heap of gobbledegook, but what it did tell me is that over the last 12 months there has been I think it was 1250 potholes fixed. I do not understand how the government think it is smart to just keep going back and filling in potholes when what the government really need to do is recognise that they are just not doing it right.

Instead of building a road to a standard, they are building a road to a cost, and instead of having engineers with experience and who understand the types of material available in South-West Coast – the tuff and the rubble and the materials they use to build the roads with, the base and the percentage of clay versus the percentage of rock – they do not have engineers with that local knowledge. What they are using are economists to put the road specifications and contracts together, so it is no wonder that we are not seeing the work hold up for any length of time. I am really surprised that the government thought it was good to give me information that demonstrated that in 2023, 1250 potholes had been filled on the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road alone. I mean, surely any person who understands any concept of business knows that you should actually invest in something to last, not just keep patching up and bandaiding, because that ends up costing far more than actually doing it right the first time.

There are also changes to the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994. That makes me come to the exposure draft. The government have put out an expression of interest to have some feedback on the animal welfare laws that are coming up soon, and they are very, very concerning. The government is planning on putting the legislation through but not working out the details of the legislation. The government have put out an exposure draft on a piece of legislation that will have a massive effect on the agricultural industry. The worrying part is that this exposure draft will occur. They will then put the legislation through and work out the details over the next two years.

I spoke with a vet at length recently. One of the things he said to me was that this legislation, by not having the detail, will actually compromise animal welfare rather than improve animal welfare. It is going to have subjective language that is not based on science. What my opinion is of a positive experience for an animal might be very different to what somebody else's experience is. I have travelled the world on an agricultural scholarship and looked at agriculture in many countries around the world. I saw a cow in Canada that stood in the one spot and was looked after by the farmers there, and for a farmer who farms in Australia and has animals outdoors it was quite a different setting. If I had no knowledge of animals and had not worked with them, I would probably have thought that that was quite extreme, yet those animals in Canada are well looked after. The farmers talked about their animals like I always experienced when I was at a mothers' group – have they got the right mattress, have they got the right kit, as they call it, and the right diet? But if someone had come to my farms in the past, in winter they might have seen animals standing around a trough with quite a lot of mud around the trough that they were feeding from, and they might have said, 'That's an unacceptable way for an animal to be treated.' If the animal is well and it is not affecting their feet, it is quite normal practice. But somebody who is from the city and who does not understand what animal practice normally is might be quite offended by that; they might think that is a negative experience.

I come to Melbourne and go where I have to stay when I am here from Monday to Friday during a sitting week, and I have seen people getting in the lift with a Great Dane. I was really shocked that people would live in an apartment with a Great Dane. To me that is animal cruelty. That is a negative experience for a dog that I believe should be outside and really enjoying their experience. So it is subjective: what goes for one is different for another. I think that is the point of the animal welfare bill. We need to make sure it is science based and not just opinion. What I saw I was shocked by because I had never seen it before, but that animal may well be comfortable and enjoying life, just like the cow in Canada that I just spoke about. But because I am not used to that, it is the same – a subjective view.

This bill is just another Labor bill of filling in time, and I hopefully have done that suitably myself in the last 20 seconds.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:09): It actually really does give me pleasure to rise to speak to the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, because I think what this bill says about this place is that it actually takes scrutiny really, really importantly. To that end, dots, dashes, semicolons and commas are really important, can be interpreted in different ways and can be shown to have ramifications, so having a bill like this that does go and amend all those inaccuracies is very important and, as I said, adds to the suite of scrutiny that occurs in this place. The Statute Law Revision Bill is an important demonstration of our commitment to ensuring that the laws and legislation in this place are clear and accessible to all Victorians. The bill's purpose is to make minor amendments to fix typographical, grammatical and other errors in legislation to update Victoria's statutes to ensure that they remain relevant and give competence to the clarity and accuracy of the legislation, and it is very important that these amendments do not change the substantive law, only making minor and technical changes in terms of those typographical, grammatical and other errors. Even though this bill fixes minor errors, it is important to have the utmost care in ensuring the ambiguities, omissions and errors are corrected.

The bill will make specific amendments to typographical and grammatical errors in the Building Act 1993, the Docklands Act 1991, the EastLink Project Act 2004, the Forests Act 1958, the Gas Industry Act 2001, the Heritage Act 2017, the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994, the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009, the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. It also goes on to update the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 to reflect changes to the definition of 'building practitioner' in the Building Act 1993 made by the Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023, and it removes a reference from the Safety on Public Land Act 2004 to another provision of that act which was repealed by the Sustainable Forests (Timber) and Wildlife Amendment Act 2014. Finally, it also makes various updates to the Road Safety Act 1986, including to repeal redundant definitions and update a reference to reflect changes made by the Transport Legislation (Amendment) Act 2004.

I did mention at the beginning of my contribution that scrutiny in this place is really important. I have the great pleasure of sitting as chair of SARC, the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, an honour in this Parliament, which I know the member for Greenvale had previously. It would be really remiss of me not to speak about the committee, in a very general sense of course, and the work that it does. SARC's role really is about legal oversight and to make sure that the legislation that is passed in this place works to the best of its ability. The committee assists all of us in this space, but it assists all Victorians as well, who have access to a much clearer set of laws. It is important work, and it is carried out by that joint committee from different parties in both the Council and the Assembly. To that end I acknowledge David Davis, Moira Deeming, Rachel Payne, Sonja Terpstra and Sheena Watt in the other place and of course the member for Shepparton and the member for Tarneit in the Assembly. SARC really is just another cog in the machine of ensuring that bills and legislation that go through Parliament undergo all the appropriate checks and balances. In mentioning the members of the committee, we really are supported by an absolutely superb secretariat, and that secretariat is headed up by Helen Mason, a fine person and indeed someone whose knowledge and interpretation of the law are just absolutely spot on.

I truly enjoy the discussions that she and I, in my capacity as chair, have around her interpretation of words. It really is terrific I guess on an intellectual level but also to have someone in this place who works to support members in this house and who can deliver support in a way that is easily broken down and understood. It truly is a skill, and I commend Helen Mason extraordinarily highly. I also would like to mention Professor Jeremy Gans, who does the human rights charter work – another valuable resource that this place has. Together they truly are the dynamic duo that sits behind the SARC. I also would like to mention the great work that Katie Helme does on this committee with all the subordinate legislation and regulations, as well as Simon Dinsbergs and Sonya Caruana. Thank

you so much for all the work that you do so that scrutiny of acts and regulations can take place to the very high level that it does.

I know that those of us around this place all read the *Alert Digest* that comes out every sitting week, and there truly is a lot of work that has gone into those. SARC alerts the Parliament to the use of certain legislative practices and allows the Parliament to consider whether these practices are necessary, appropriate or desirable in the circumstances. It considers bills and legislation in relation to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and reports to Parliament as to whether bills are compatible with human rights. It also makes comments pursuant to the terms of reference under the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to talk very briefly about the Oxford comma. I know that the member for Essendon sometimes enjoys debate about the Oxford comma, but commas are important – almost as important as a pocket square on a suit, member for Pascoe Vale. Commas are important, and the interpretation of them is important. In doing research for this bill and research on the comma, I found on Twitter a handle by the name of @IAmOxfordComma. I was very interested to see that there is one follower of @IAmOxfordComma from this place – and a shout-out to Ms Shing in the other place, who is evidently very interested in the Oxford comma.

Very quickly, I do note there was a United States Court of Appeals case back in 2017 which involved dairy workers in the United States, *O'Connor v. Oakhurst Dairy*. The nub of the case was about the misplacement of – or the lack of – an Oxford comma. That dispute between the company and its delivery drivers involved the scope of overtime law. To cut a long story short, as a result of there being no comma in the list of the duties that had to be performed by those dairy workers, there was an unintentional consequence for the dairy company, meaning that it had to pay overtime where it would not ordinarily have had to to those dairy workers. So with no serial comma to be found in the exempted list of activities, it led to that dispute, and the dispute was over whether the drivers fell within the exemption from overtime law or not. As a result of there being no comma, it was found that those dairy delivery drivers in the States got the overtime, as they probably should have anyway. I will leave my contribution there, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (12:19): Can I thank the member for Narre Warren South for that very good explanation of how the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee works. We all learn something from the contributions that are made in here, and we do thank SARC for the work that they do on behalf of all of us in looking at legislation – but that explanation was very good.

When it comes to the issue of Oxford commas, Louise Asher, who is a former member for Brighton and former Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party –

**A member** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** And as the member says, a former English schoolteacher. I had never, ever heard of an Oxford comma until Louise explained to me in great detail one day how you use an Oxford comma. English schoolteachers do have a purpose, they just did not necessarily teach me well enough at school to know that. But they are very important. Louise was always very much the disciplinarian when it came to using that sort of thing and having the correct English as you do stuff. But the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, as everyone else has said, makes a number of effectively typographical and punctuation changes to a number of pieces of legislation. There are a few of those that I want to focus my contribution around, and I suppose the first of those would be to the Forests Act 1958. It changes one word, but more importantly it replaces a semicolon with a full stop. I would have thought that full stop probably is symptomatic of the Andrews government and now the Allan government's attitude to the forestry industry. It is effectively a full stop for the native timber industry here in Victoria, because it has been shut down.

If you think about what has happened to the forestry industry, it is absolutely a travesty of natural justice for all the people and all the communities that worked in that industry who no longer have

employment. They were effectively hung out to dry over a number of years and effectively starved out of the industry. If you think about the third-party litigation by extremists, if you think about the invasion of coupes, the damage to machinery and the fact that they would go in there and they would put metal spikes into trees that then put the lives of operators at risk – if their equipment or saws hit those spikes they could potentially get very seriously injured or killed. But somehow those extremists thought that was the way to stop it. They tied VicForests up in the courts perpetually to the point where they had spent more money on legal action, because the extremists had pro bono lawyers who would act on their behalf but VicForests as a government agency had to pay the market rates for the lawyers to do the work back the other way. So that full stop is, as I said, very symptomatic of the stop to the forestry industry here.

If you think about the forestry industry, one of the things that those on the other side of the house actually do not realise when it comes to the CO<sub>2</sub> debate and the climate debate is that a timber industry – a forestry industry – is one of the perfect stores of carbon into the future with the absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. If you actually look at some of the transactions that are happening in Victoria now, recently a German company invested \$200 million into western Victoria to buy farming land to grow trees to get environmental credits in Australia for back in Germany. Under their rules, after 15 years those trees can be cut down. The carbon is stored, under their rules, in whatever product is actually made out of that timber – whether it be paper, whether it be furniture, whether it be housing trusses or whatever – and then they grow another lot of trees for another 15 years and get another lot of environmental credits.

I do not believe the government thought through this issue of closing down the native timber industry, because once a tree gets mature it does not actually store as much carbon as when it grows. So there was the opportunity to actually use the public estate native timber industry to have timber to do the things that we need to do in Victoria. I note Opal in Maryvale in the Latrobe Valley has lost another 220 jobs because of two things: one, the lack of timber, and the other, the high energy prices here in Victoria. They reassessed their whole business model based on policy decisions by the Allan government and, before that, the Andrews government. The fact that there is a full stop in the forestry act – I would really appreciate it if the government would actually give serious consideration to how we manage the public estate better. Less than 5 per cent of the total public estate was actually eligible to be logged, and that was logged over an 80-year rotation, so very, very little of it was ever logged in one year. As the forest industry would tell you, every tree that was cut down was planted and regenerated so it could actually grow and actually store carbon. I am disappointed that the collective Labor governments over the last decade have literally taken an axe to the timber industry and closed it down.

Not only is it a valuable employer in our communities, not only does it give us wood products for the things that we need, not only is it an excellent carbon store; the last bit of that jigsaw puzzle is we will still use wood products. We will import it from overseas; we will import it from countries that do not have the environmental standards that we have here in Australia. It is out of sight, out of mind. In some of the South-East Asian countries, some of the South American countries, forests will still be logged, there will be more environmental harm and there will be more species at risk because they do not have the standards that we have here in Victoria. So it is very, very disappointing what they did to the forest industry.

As we see the debate unfolding, now we are seeing the same practices being put in place by third-party litigants in the intensive animal industry here in Victoria, and there are people, including some in the other place, whose stated aim in life is to actually close down animal agriculture here in Victoria. I think it would be a tragedy if the Allan government has legislation in the future that enables those third parties to actually bring the intensive animal industry under the same pressure that the forest industry was under, to the point where they actually vacate the space here in Victoria. That is why I am so disappointed that the Allan government actually supported the upper house inquiry into the pig industry, because the aim of the Animal Justice Party is to close that down. That does not mean that

people will stop eating bacon, it does not mean that people will stop eating ham, it does not mean they will not have their roast pork; it just means that it will be imported from interstate or, most likely, from overseas. Again we are losing jobs, we are losing an industry here in Victoria, because of ideology rather than actually having serious, practical ways of doing things into the future.

The other one I want to talk about in my brief time left is the Road Safety Act 1986. We were fortunate a number of years ago to go and be briefed by the Australian Road Research Board, which has now been turned into the National Transport Research Organisation. They have an absolutely brilliant facility out in Port Melbourne that does research on how you build roads and how you maintain roads. I would urge the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and I would urge the Allan government to actually take some advice from the National Transport Research Organisation about how you build roads, because if you look at how the roads are constructed in Victoria now, within a year or two we are seeing major potholes, we are seeing the roads breaking up, because they are not being built to the standard that we need.

In that briefing recently I asked the organisation a question about how you get contracts written that do not blow out and will actually deliver to the specifications that you want. He explained to us that there is a recipe there for how you go through the tender process and how you hold the contractors to account to deliver what you wanted at the price you actually agreed to. I would urge the government to go and actually get some advice on that, because you see the major projects here in Victoria, road projects particularly, just blow out and blow out and blow out. The CEO was a former director of roads in Queensland, and he said there is a way you can actually solve this if you actually do it right from the very, very start. That organisation I think is based here in Victoria. Their research building is out in Port Melbourne. There is a real opportunity for the government to actually build better roads and get value for taxpayers in the roads that are built there, because as you drive around regional Victoria and as you drive around some of the suburbs of Melbourne now, you see the roads are breaking up, you see major potholes there and you see how that is impacting safety.

There is a very, very good saying – it has been around for a long time – that if you fix country roads, you save country lives. We know the road toll percentage-wise is higher in regional Victoria than it is in the city. Part of that is around the condition of the roads. Particularly for those that are not aware of the major potholes and the break-up of the roads it can be very, very dangerous. There are so many 40-kilometre signs now across Victoria. If they spent the money they did on buying 40-kilometre signs and 60-kilometre signs and putting them up, they would actually fix a lot of those roads. Those signs are put where the road is not necessarily bad, and people become immune to those signs and do not necessarily obey them, which is at their own peril. But I wish the bill a speedy passage.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:30): We know that with statute law revision bills, or bills of this nature, the Parliament regularly considers and passes such bills to correct ambiguities, minor omissions and errors found in statutes. I think the member for Narre Warren South has beautifully articulated exactly why we should do this – because of the significant impact they can make, subject to the way any such clauses, commas or otherwise are interpreted should matters go to court or however else the legislation is being utilised, I should say, in the customary way. I therefore would like to rebut the proposition of this bill being a time-waster in itself, because surely when you are varying an act in any way it should be brought as a matter of transparency before the Parliament when you factor in the impact that changes to an act can make, even if it is a comma or otherwise. Whilst I would note that we are not making substantive changes to the meaning of the various legislation that is listed as part of this Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, nevertheless I would have thought that to be consistent in terms of transparency bringing such changes before the Parliament is right and proper. On that premise I hope I have successfully rebutted some of the commentary that has been put forward to date.

**A member:** Hear, hear.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes, thank you. There is some really important legislation here, and on that note I am going to speak to some of that, because that is obviously my duty when speaking before the Parliament on a bill.

With regard to the Gas Industry Act 2001, there was a bit of a long bow drawn with regard to pursuit of Victorian energy upgrades and investment in renewables and a purported anti-gas sentiment by the government. There are a couple of points I want to say with regard to that. I think those propositions miss the fundamental underlying point when it comes to energy efficiency and reducing emissions. This is the crux that I am coming to: our targets of 75 to 80 per cent reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2045 align Victoria with the Paris goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We have already seen to date some of the dramatic climate changes that are impacting many across the globe, and often the most vulnerable are in the greatest danger when it comes to climate change.

Coming back to the proposition that was made with regard to jobs in gas – I just want to clear this up – Seeley International have made a commercial decision to expand their operations to produce electric cooling appliances for export to the USA. I did actually look on Seeley International's website, or the media release that they made, and they themselves said there is a really strong emphasis on energy efficiency with the products that they are seeking to export as well – funny that. That is the private market. Consumers in Victoria and across the country are voting with their wallets and are favouring efficient electric heating and cooling appliances to slash their energy bills. Who knew; it is actually consumers who are driving this. We are supporting them and we are driving it for the right reasons, because when you are looking at climate change and when you are looking at controlling power prices, efficiency is just logical. It is actually one of the best ways. When you are looking at cost of living but also making a cleaner and healthier planet, then it all makes good common sense, because there was an inference before that somehow investing in renewables is not really good common sense. I do not know where that came from. That was a slightly odd and obscure comment to make, and I will just be quite candid in stating my opinion on that, but I do intend to back it up with some information as well.

The notion that the government's policy is responsible for the decision made by a private company is fanciful. Our transition off fossil gas will take –

*Members interjecting.*

**Nina TAYLOR:** It is a transition; it is not in a day. It is simply not feasible that our government's policies have led to Seeley's decision. Since our announcement in July 2023 there have just under 26,000 new residential gas connections in Victoria. I am not resiling from the commitment to transitioning – that is extremely important – but I think that purely to reduce it to a preface of anti-gas is actually trying to say 'Look over here' and ignoring what is glaringly obvious to everyone on this side of the chamber when it comes to the imperative to reduce emissions for the sake of all species around the world, because I did hear the word 'global' mentioned before and I think that is extremely relevant. We are all part of the earth, and we all have an obligation to be responsible.

There is another part of the bill which refers to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007, so I did want to speak somewhat to that. I have already alluded to our very strong targets in terms of reducing emissions by 2035 and of course net zero by 2045. First of all, I would say we are absolutely leading the nation in climate action, and you never hear those opposite talk about anything to do with preserving our planet ever, ever, ever. Talking about efficiency and what has been achieved, we smashed our 2020 emissions target of 15 to 20 per cent reduction – we achieved 29.6 per cent – and in 2021 we achieved a 32.3 per cent reduction. So we do not just talk about it, we are delivering on it. And that is the thing – it is all fine and dandy to meander through these three-word slogans, but actually delivering for Victorians and what Victorians actually want is another thing, and that is exactly what we do. I should say we are decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, and since this government was elected in 2014 we have cut emissions by more than any other state.

**A member:** Hear, hear!

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes, exactly. That is no mean feat, but that is a commitment by – well, I am not sure about those opposite – so many Victorians.

In fact the other day I had the great fortune – and I think I have mentioned this once, but I will mention it again – to visit Equinix, which is a large data centre in Fishermans Bend, with the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Climate Action and Minister for the State Electricity Commission – Minister D'Ambrosio, I should say. We were very pleased to be at this private company, which launched large-scale solar right there in Fishermans Bend because they know the value in terms of energy efficiency in reducing power costs into the future. We know that data centres, which are increasingly important in the digital age, are very energy dense. But here we have somebody – we have a private company; I should not say just 'somebody' – that recognises the importance of being energy efficient. And not only that – even in the design of the actual building they have allowed airflow, and they are actually keeping the data information systems at a higher temperature. This is really forward thinking happening right in this state. And why do you think it is happening? Well, on the one hand we have a state which has really strong emissions reduction targets, but we also are incentivising and supporting industry. Not only are we doing it at a government level when it comes to hospitals, police stations, government buildings and schools but we actually helped this particular company with a 25 per cent rebate to make it more affordable for them to invest in large-scale solar.

*Members interjecting.*

**Nina TAYLOR:** Oh, you do not like private companies investing in renewable energy. Sorry, it is happening. Look at it. And it is right here in Victoria because we have got real leadership on this side of the chamber and we are not putting our heads in the sand about climate change. We know it is happening, but we are getting ahead of it. Wouldn't it be nice if one day those opposite did not live in denial? But, hey, that is okay. We will keep doing the hard work. We will keep the lights on. We know we have to do that, and the best way to do that is by investing in renewable energy, because it is the quickest and it is the cheapest.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:40): It is good to be with you, Acting Speaker Hamer, and any number of colleagues in the chamber at the moment to address the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. I must pay credit from the get-go to the member for Malvern, the Shadow Attorney-General, my colleague Mr O'Brien.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** You are out of your seat, member for Mordialloc. Don't you interject from there; that is disorderly.

It was a herculean effort to contribute for 30 minutes as the coalition's lead speaker on this bill. It was a masterclass in addressing a statute law revision bill. From time to time these statute law revision bills or statute law amendment bills come before the Parliament. They are purposed with fixing up typographical errors and occasionally spelling errors in various acts. As the member for Malvern stated in his contribution, blow me over with a feather, this is the priority of the government – to be fixing typographical errors and spelling errors in acts as opposed to dealing with the issues that are of critical importance to the Victorian people at the moment. Whether it be the cost-of-living crisis, with prices going up left, right and centre, or families, individuals and businesses around the state being pushed and pulled, stretched and contorted every which way just to meet their bill payments, whether it be their energy bills, their school bills, their grocery bills or their mortgage repayments, these are the matters that are front of mind for Victorians at the moment. If only the Allan Labor government would come to this place with a bill that addressed those matters in substance, I am sure that the Victorian people would be grateful.

I do want to pay tribute during the course of this contribution to someone who frankly means quite a lot to me and my team, and that is a lady named Sally Turner. Sally is a staff member of mine whose

final day in the office is today. She has been on my staff for a couple of years now, and she is the very heart and soul of the office. She is loyal, perhaps to a fault; she is irreverent; she is competent – she is the very best that you would want in a staff member. Today she leaves my office after a couple of years of service. I wish her all the best, and her partner Danny and their new baby boy Teddy as well. I am going to miss Sally, I really will.

This particular bill seeks to amend a number of acts, including the Forests Act 1958. Now, the Forests Act 1958 – the member for Gippsland South, who is in the chamber at the moment, will no doubt know this much better than me because it affects and impacts his community more than it does mine, but the government's decision on sustainable forestry in the state is an absolute debacle. It is an absolute disgrace in fact. I mean, the very principle of a sustainable forestry industry in this state is that it is – pause, hold the press – sustainable. What we have actually done by banning a sustainable forestry industry in this state is shoot ourselves in the foot. We are now importing wood – timber – from other parts of the world that frankly do not have the same stringent regulatory requirements that we do here in Victoria. The green left movement in this state have been sold a lie by this Labor government, and it has absolutely done over communities like Mr O'Brien's and those in the east of the state especially.

The Gas Industry Act 2001 is also amended by this bill. Just think that the Allan Labor government's intent is to ban the Bunnings barbecue. Could you imagine a Bunnings barbecue run on anything but gas? That is their intent, quite clearly: to ban the Bunnings barbecue, to ban the wok. Where is the member for Box Hill? He is not here to listen to this. Arguably, Acting Speaker – oh yes, you are there. Well, I am pleased you are here to hear this, Acting Speaker Hamer. I just think that the Labor government's intent to actually ban gas in this state – and that is their stated intent – is un-Victorian. It is un-Australian. I could not imagine a state or a country –

**Steve Dimopoulos:** Make Victoria great again, hey?

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Well, we fully intend to in 2026, minister at the table, and just so you know, Hansard will likely record that coming from your lips and not mine.

It is absolutely crazy. As the member for Malvern pointed out in his contribution – and he was rudely interrupted by the minister at the table at the time – any day of the week ending in 'y' there are less emissions from gas than there are from brown coal.

**Steve Dimopoulos** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Well, the minister at the table is being very disorderly, and he has drawn my attention to the fact that gas is expensive. I will tell you why gas is expensive: gas is expensive because of the policies of this Labor government, because they do not want to explore any more gas in this state. They do not want to extract by conventional means. Let us set aside the elephant of fracking, because we do not need to do that in this state. They do not want to extract any more gas from Victoria for Victorians, for Victorian households, for Victorian industry. No, they just want to ban it. They want to ban gas, they want to ban the Bunnings barbecue and they want to ban the wok, and that would be a very difficult conversation for a number of Labor members, I am sure.

Act 11 that is amended in this Statute Law Revision Bill is the Road Safety Act 1986, and I just want to share with the house some of the times that I have had the great privilege of travelling around country Victoria. I have met with some wonderful communities recently in Bendigo and further west in the state. I fully intend to, over the course of this year, visit more communities around Victoria again. But something that is front of their mind and something that is certainly front of my mind is road safety, and the lack of road safety caused by this government's inability to fix potholes. Lowering the speed from 100 kilometres an hour to 60 kilometres an hour is not fixing a pothole, but that seems to be the inclination, the will, of the Allan Labor government to fix potholes. They do not. They do not send the work crews out. I would fully expect members representing rural and regional communities in this place to know full well – better than me, living in metropolitan Melbourne – just

how challenging some of those potholes are and just how deep and wide some of those potholes are. I seem to recall the member for Gippsland South actually taking a bag of potting mixture and a couple of plants to try and patch them up himself but also to demonstrate the point that the government is not doing anything about it. Of course they are not, because they have taken out – what is the percentage, member for Gippsland South –

**Danny O'Brien:** Forty-five per cent.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** a 45 per cent reduction in the road maintenance budget in the last three years. And you wonder why there are potholes around this state which have not been fixed. In this broad-ranging contribution that I have made –

*Members interjecting.*

**Brad ROWSWELL:** thanks to the peanut gallery just over my shoulder – I want to draw the house's attention to one final thing. That is the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and some of the amendments that this bill imposes upon that act. We can have as many targets as we like, targets that actually are not legally enforceable by this place or by the courts, but what the Victorian people need and deserve at the moment is energy security. They need the security to know that when their power bills arrive they will not be having to take out a loan or add to their own credit card to pay them off. They want the lights kept on. They just want their government – and they have not delivered this in 10 years – to deliver them affordable, reliable and renewable energy. We have been asking for it for 10 years. The Allan Labor government have not delivered upon it as yet, but I live in hope.

**Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:50):** It is wonderful to rise to contribute to this impassioned debate in relation to the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. Goodness gracious me, it has been a wideranging debate. There were spurious claims put forth by the member for Sandringham regarding the cancellation of the Bunnings barbecue. It is a scandal that such falsehoods are being trumpeted throughout this place, but there have been some wonderful contributions. We had the member for Narre Warren South give us a really detailed exposition of the use of the Oxford comma and its importance in the context of legal judgements in the United States, where the lack of a comma resulted in a very significant court judgement that I think very deservedly gave dairy drivers a significant amount of overtime. We heard from the Shadow Attorney-General, who gave a very significant 30-minute address in relation to this bill, which I enjoyed greatly.

It does occur to me that this is not the first statute law amendment bill that we have had the opportunity to debate recently, but I think there have been some comments from those opposite – and I include the member for Sandringham among those and the member for South-West Coast – that somehow we should not be doing this, that apparently accurate legislation does not matter. Of course this week we have had amendments to the constitution, and now we are amending a range of existing statutes in the Victorian statutes books. Accuracy in legislation clearly matters. I take issue with the member for South-West Coast, who I believe yesterday described the debate over the SEC bills as an affront to democracy and yet today sought to disparage the entire existence of this debate. Nothing could be more important than ensuring accurate legislation, as the member for Narre Warren South explained in his contribution.

As I said, the previous statute law amendment bill that we considered in this place was in relation to references to the Sovereign. I know that many speakers found this a fascinating piece of legislation. I was certainly among those, because it spoke to changes in language over time and the way in which language has evolved. Certain antiquated and arcane uses of language, in particular in relation to the Sovereign, have evolved and are no longer seen as fit for the contemporary usage of the English language we have in this place. One example was the removal I believe of all references to 'His Majesty's loyal opposition'. I suppose that is apt, given that loyalty is at such a premium among the opposition at this time in this state. But the concept of a loyal opposition is a really fascinating one. It

is so central to our system of government, the idea that you can sit on those benches and you can criticise –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am not sure if I actually want to even speak, but whilst this is a very broad bill and there is a lot of leeway given, legislation debates are not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** The debate has been extremely wideranging, but I will uphold the point of order and bring the member back to the bill.

**Iwan WALTERS:** Thanks very much, Acting Speaker. Certainly I was not reflecting upon the current opposition, merely the concept of opposition, but I greatly appreciate your ruling.

The member for Narre Warren South also touched upon some of the institutions within this Parliament that we as members all rely upon, and I include the chief parliamentary counsel, who has no doubt worked with departments to ensure that the provisions within this bill are accurate and that we are updating legislation to ensure its accuracy. I also acknowledge the work of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which I was very privileged to chair prior to the member for Narre Warren South, to interrogate every piece of legislation that goes through this place, including statute law revision bills.

I do want to reflect upon some of the acts that this bill seeks to amend. I think it is actually really revealing. Much as the previous statute law amendment bill told us a lot about the evolution of language and the way in which words themselves have evolved over time, this statute law revision bill highlights I think the very core of what it is to be a state government and a state Parliament: acts that touch upon the building industry, acts which govern and regulate road safety, acts which govern and regulate the usage of our forests.

The acts that this bill seeks to amend also tell us a lot about the priorities of Labor governments across different eras. I want to dwell firstly upon the Docklands Act 1991. As someone who was quite young in the 1990s, before this bill came to Parliament I presumed that the revitalisation of Docklands began somewhat later into the 1990s. It was very interesting for me to learn that it was in fact an initiative of the Cain–Kirner governments in 1991. It is worth remembering, as indeed you touched upon in your own contribution when you were not in the chair, Acting Speaker Hamer, just how moribund and decrepit the Docklands area was by the late 1980s and 1990s. With the advent of containerisation within our maritime trade a lot of the former activities of the Port of Melbourne which had once been in Victoria Harbour moved further up the Yarra towards Williamstown and the new container ports at Webb Dock and elsewhere.

Once upon a time, though, Victoria Dock was the largest man-made harbour anywhere in the world. Sir John Coode came out from England in the 1880s and transformed the Yarra, enabling the Port of Melbourne to become the biggest port in Australia, a position it holds today. I think it is worth dwelling upon what happened to bring that port to fruition as a really core part of the global trading network through the 19th and 20th centuries. But by the late 1980s that entire precinct around Victoria Harbour, from Spencer Street down to the Yarra, was, as I say, moribund, decrepit and, frankly, dangerous. It took vision to contemplate what it could one day become, and in the space of little more than three decades we have got a precinct, as the Minister for Precincts emphasised, that is really a core to the lifeblood of Melbourne. The stadium that was built there I think opened for the 2000 season, if memory serves correctly, and is now patronised by hundreds of thousands if not millions of people every single year going to watch football matches, cricket matches and other forms of entertainment. It is also a place that tens of thousands of people call home, and I am conscious that a significant number of those are relatively newly arrived to Australia. It is a place, much as a port always has been, where people come in, they make their first landfall in Australia as it were, they live in the apartments in Docklands and then, as I am very well aware in Greenvale, they move out to new areas of our city and establish their family and their life here.

Another act that this bill seeks to amend is the Heritage Act 2017. I am privileged to represent an area that has an immense amount of heritage. I have reflected on this before in a previous debate regarding amendments to the Heritage Act. We have areas like Woodlands park, Westmeadows village with its historic bridge and its war memorial, and other really important sites of community. The Shadow Attorney-General touched upon the Royal Exhibition Building as something that is a very significant site of heritage, and it certainly is. Those of us who are keen fans of political history would know that it is where Australia itself was first declared a nation and where the first Parliament was opened I think in May 1901 by the Duke of Cornwall, son of the then newly crowned King Edward VII. The Earl of Hopetoun, as the first Governor-General, opened the first Australian Parliament there, and it is to where the members of this house decamped for 27 years while this hall was, I agree, shamefully entrusted to our federal colleagues until they were able to get a village of their own.

The Royal Exhibition Building, much as it does for the Shadow Attorney-General, conjures up some memories for me of going there with a sense of trepidation for examinations, but rather more happily it is also the place where I became engaged to my wife some years ago. It is an important place in our state and in our city – a World Heritage site – and I am glad that the Department of Transport and Planning is currently finalising the strategy plan and the management plan for that uniquely impressive building within our city that is just down the road from us here.

This bill also seeks to amend the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009, an enabling act that creates the framework for so much of what this government has done in building Victoria, much as Labor governments that have come before us have done: major projects like the North East Link, which the Minister for Precincts talked about in his contribution; major projects like the Craigieburn bypass that was built by the Brumby government in 2007 and which is central to my community; major projects like the Metro Tunnel that is shortly to open ahead of schedule and which will free up our rail network and connect people from Sunbury in the north right the way through to Pakenham and Cranbourne in the south. The acts in this bill matter. I commend this bill to the house.

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

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Housing**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Planning. In what year will the government achieve its yearly 80,000 new homes target?

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I am delighted to get up here and talk about this government's plan for building 800,000 more homes by 2034. The fact is – I will let the opposition in on a little secret – you do not deliver more affordable homes by blocking them.

**John Pesutto:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister had plenty of time before being brought to the microphone, and since, and has not addressed the question. Can you bring her back to the question?

**The SPEAKER:** Minister for Planning, I ask you to come back to the question that was asked.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** The question is around building more homes for more Victorians, and –

**A member** interjected.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** That is right, in order to build more homes you need a plan to build more homes. As I was saying –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** The Minister for Planning had only commenced her answer. There is no point of order.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** As I said, I am letting those opposite in on a little secret: that the way to build more homes is certainly not to block them but about providing the right conditions to support industry to get on and build 800,000 more homes that we know Victorians need. What we have done is that in September last year this government, the Allan Labor government, announced its housing statement, and that statement is a set of initiatives which provide those levers that government will be pulling to support industry to get on and deliver 800,000 homes. That includes working with industry, alongside community and alongside local government. The opposition leader can sit and shake –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, may I refer you to page 153 of *Rulings from the Chair*, Speaker Maddigan’s ruling of 2003:

When responding to a question a minister must address the question rather than responding generally.

The question was 12 words long and it asked for a year, and the minister has already spent half of the time available and has not answered the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you for raising the point of order, Manager of Opposition Business. I am well aware of the standing orders. However, I cannot direct the minister how to answer a question. If the minister is being relevant to the question, then there is no point of order. The minister was being relevant.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** As I was saying, last year this government released its housing statement, and that sets out a number of initiatives about how we are going to support industry, working alongside local government and working alongside our communities to deliver on that commitment to building 800,000 homes over the next decade. One of those initiatives, can I say, is the development facilitation program. This is a pathway where industry can come direct to me as the decision-maker with big, major residential projects worth more than \$50 million that will deliver at least 10 per cent affordable housing.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the relevancy rule is farcical if a minister does not need to go anywhere near the question that has been asked. We asked a specific question: for a year.

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**James Newbury:** On the issue of relevancy I would seek your guidance. This is now farcical. It does not matter what question we ask, ministers refuse to answer the question.

**The SPEAKER:** As I have said previously, I cannot direct a minister how to answer a question. The minister was referring to new home targets. She was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Sonya KILKENNY:** My very next point was this, with the development facilitation program: already 5200 dwellings are currently being actively considered under this new pathway. As well, we have had hundreds of inquiries, with 34,000 dwellings now in the development facilitation program preapplication stage. These are thousands of homes, and it goes to show this development facilitation program is doing exactly what we wanted it to do, and that is to stimulate interest to be able to get industry to get on and –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I do note previous Speakers’ rulings that ministers’ answers have to not just be relevant but be succinct in replying. With 5 seconds left and the minister not replying to the question, I would say the minister is not being succinct.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded her answer.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): The Housing Industry Association said the cost of a house and land package is ‘significantly higher in Victoria than it is in

other parts of the country'. After almost a decade under a Labor government, why are Victorians paying more for their new homes?

**The SPEAKER:** There is a very tenuous link between the first question and the supplementary. In that it relates to new homes, I will allow it.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:10): The very point of our housing statement and our plan for Victoria is to address the very issue of housing affordability here in Victoria. We are directly addressing this housing crisis, which is why the Allan Labor government is pulling every lever available to it to get those conditions right, to provide that certainty and to establish that pipeline of work for our industry to get on and build and deliver the 800,000 homes that Victorians need over the next decade. This is exactly the kind of work that we are doing and highlights even more the very stark difference between those of us on this side of the house – who have a plan to bring down the cost of living, to make housing more affordable, more diverse and to give Victorians more choice about where they live – and those opposite, who are entrenched in their own leadership crisis.

#### **Ministers statements: education funding**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:11): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting communities through our school partnerships with local community organisations. If you speak to anyone who is passionate about making our community better, the conversation will quickly turn to education and the importance of our schools. The Allan Labor government knows the importance of our schools – that it does not end at the school gates or when the bell rings. We know how important it is. When you think about the \$31 billion investment, we have built more schools than any other state. And when we also think about the teacher workforce, all of us – whether it is you, Speaker, or me – are here because of the power of a teacher. The member for Nepean would have been taught his backhand by a teacher teaching tennis, and equally not to rush the net, because they might just lob over him to the member for Berwick. We also know the importance of reading, writing and maths, and our NAPLAN results show that – the importance of knowing how to count and doing your maths. We know the member for Berwick is practising at the moment.

We are getting on with the job. Our attendance rates are the best in the nation. We have the best rates for Indigenous students right across Australia. The best attendance rates are right here in Victoria. We know the student-to-teacher ratios, again, are best here in Victoria. We also know, as a result of the recent NAPLAN tests, that our students are top of their class – 10 out of 10. But we are not wasting a minute. We are getting on with it, because we know on this side of the chamber that investing in public education is the most important investment we can have in our future. That is why we are getting on with the job – to make sure we have more teachers. We are not rushing the net, we are taking our time. We have got the pace, and we are going to seize the day. As Robin Williams said in *Dead Poets Society*, seize the day.

#### **Maryvale paper mill**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. In 2019 the former Premier said about Opal Australian Paper:

... these jobs are secure. Up to 1000 jobs at ... Maryvale ... up to 2050.

Two hundred jobs were lost in 2022 with the end of white paper manufacturing, and today a further 220 Opal workers are losing their jobs. Why has the Premier broken Labor's promise to secure jobs at Opal's Maryvale site?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. At the outset can I convey on behalf of I think all members of Parliament that our thoughts are with those workers today at Maryvale. For some time now, as the Leader of the National Party

knows well, as do his colleagues who represent this really important region in our state, this is an organisation that has had some challenges in recent years – challenges with wood supply that go back to decisions made by previous ministers in a previous government around protections that were put in place for the greater glider. I am sure the Leader of the National Party has asked this question in a bipartisan way, in a genuine way that perhaps his colleagues are not allowing the question to be answered in. Our thoughts are with those workers, because this has been an incredibly challenging period for those workers.

In addition to the issues of wood supply that have come about as a result of the transition of the timber industry, the member referenced comments made in 2019. As the member knows well, since that period of time there have been the devastating bushfires of the 2019–20 summer that also substantially impacted on timber supply to the region and also the impact on the demand for white paper as a result of the COVID pandemic. The Leader of the National Party knows that this is something that industry itself has also identified.

What I will say to the workers in this region is that there is support provided for them through the well-established ForestWorks agency, who are there supporting workers through this difficult time. I would also point out to the Leader of the National Party that we have understood that this is a region, whether it is through the energy transition or through the timber industry transition, that we know we need to step in and provide support for, which is why we have been working hard with the local community to diversify the economy, to bring new businesses and industry into the region and to support the growth of jobs in the area. That is the commitment I give to the region: that we will continue to provide this support, acknowledging that today is a very difficult day for those workers.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:16): Opal has blamed rising energy costs and the end of white paper manufacturing for these further job losses. Will the Premier finally admit that Labor’s energy and forestry policies have failed the workers at Maryvale?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): I know that the Leader of the National Party also knows that with the energy transition there are significant opportunities, and a significant amount of work has gone on in supporting workers who have worked in those industries that have long been, I acknowledge, mainstays of the local community in the Latrobe Valley region but are going through a period of transition. That is why, whether it is the work that the energy minister and the skills minister have done in providing support to those workers –

**Peter Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question as to why Labor has failed these workers with their policies on energy and timber supply.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Alongside the direct support we have been providing to workers in both the timber and energy industries, I know the Leader of the National Party is aware of the Latrobe Valley Economic Facilitation Fund, which has already provided 930 new jobs in the area, supporting \$87 million of private investment. This is just one example of the practical support we want to continue to provide to a community that I do acknowledge is going through a difficult transition, and our thoughts are with those workers.

#### **Ministers statements: volunteers**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:18): It is a privilege to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s commitment to our state’s volunteers and community organisations. With more than 360 men’s sheds across Victoria, there are thousands of shedders who volunteer to support the health and wellbeing of each other and to bring communities together. Last week I was thrilled to join the member for Sunbury to meet with members of the Tullamarine Men’s Shed and the Hume Men’s Shed in Sunbury, which

are two of 28 men's sheds to receive grants in the latest round of the men's shed funding program. From making Christmas decorations and furniture to restoring bicycles and lawnmowers, the building and restoration projects undertaken by men's sheds certainly do not stop at the shed door. Our communities across the state benefit greatly from these volunteers, and this government is really pleased to support their work.

Volunteers contribute so much to our state, and I have seen this firsthand as Minister for Community Sport. While the government has invested a record \$1.9 billion in community sports infrastructure since 2014, this would not count for much if it were not for the hundreds of thousands of participants playing sport every week matched by the hundreds of thousands of tireless volunteers. Not only do we support our volunteers but we celebrate them, and last week I was delighted to attend the 2023 Volunteering Awards to recognise the 28 individuals and the 24 organisations who were nominated as finalists and who have all made exceptional contributions to their local communities. I am incredibly proud of all our volunteers across Victoria regardless of what area they work in, and I thank all of them for everything that they do.

### Energy policy

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:20): My question is to the Minister for Jobs and Industry. Seeley International is shutting up shop in Victoria and has blamed Labor's destructive gas policy, costing 120 Victorian job losses. Is the minister deliberately destroying Victorian manufacturing jobs because of Labor's gas policy?

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:21): Thanks for the question, but I refute the premise of the question. This government absolutely prides itself on its investment in and connection with industry across this state. When it comes to Seeley International, of course we are disappointed and saddened by the announcement that has been made in relation to jobs in New South Wales moving. I do acknowledge there would be some Victorians that are employed there, and it is our role and our job to continue to make sure that those who feel that impact in that community are well supported and transitioned. We will be working through Jobs Victoria's local employment transition services to make sure we provide information and referrals to those that are facing retrenchment. This is very early days, this announcement, and I have asked my department to work with the company and find suitable arrangements to help redeploy those that may be facing job losses in this particular region. We are certainly proud of our investments that we have made in creating local jobs across our regions, and we will continue to undertake that work.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:22): Again to the minister: how many more Victorian jobs will be lost due to Labor's ban on gas in homes and businesses?

**The SPEAKER:** I will allow the question, but it is bordering on hypothetical.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:23): I thank the member for her question, but again I refute the premise of the question. This government's commitment to and investment in clean energy mean there will be 59,000 additional jobs here in Victoria.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, how can the minister refute 120 Victorian job losses? These are workers in a cost-of-living crisis, and these workers have lost under your policy.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. Member for Evelyn, if you are going to raise a point of order, I ask you to do it according to the standing orders.

**Natalie HUTCHINS:** I relish the opportunity to remind this house that Victoria is the lead job creator out of any state and territory currently. Our robust economy has seen the strongest jobs growth, particularly in the regions across this state. Since Labor came to government in 2014 we have created

more than 760,000 new jobs, and we have seen unemployment absolutely plummet. We have seen employment rise, particularly in the regions. We are doing that through our Local Jobs First policies and through our conversion to new and clean energy, and the minister is doing a fantastic job at rolling out those changes –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was quite narrow: how many more job losses because of Labor's gas ban policy?

**The SPEAKER:** A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister had already addressed the question at the commencement of her answer. The minister has concluded her answer.

#### Ministers statements: economy

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:25): It gives me great pleasure to talk about why Melbourne, the most livable city in the world, the only Australian city in the top 10 of the power city index in the world, is a city that is buzzing with excitement at the moment. From economic events to youth summits and meetings with key regional leaders, this week is all about demonstrating exactly why we are the job creation capital of the nation – 530,000 jobs in three years, 130,000 more jobs than New South Wales.

Firstly, I want to extend a warm welcome to Melbourne to international leaders, our Commonwealth colleagues, international business delegates and of course the countless others who are down here for the ASEAN–Australia special summit. This year's special summit marks 50 years of Australia–ASEAN relations. Just last week I had the great opportunity to launch the *Southeast Asia Trade and Investment Snapshot*, and it really does provide an outline of stellar performance by this state. Last year Victoria's two-way merchandise trade with the region reached a record high of \$27.4 billion. That is a 50 per cent increase over five years. At the same time investments from South-East Asia in Victoria have supported the creation of 3500 jobs since 2018, leading the nation. Over 45,000 students from South-East Asia studied in Victoria in 2022, and of course exports of food and fibre from South-East Asia amounted to \$2.4 billion in the financial year 2018. (*Time expired*)

#### Energy policy

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:28): My question is for the Premier. Last year the world was 1.48 degrees hotter than the pre-industrial average, and the UN is quite clear that there can be no new fossil fuel extraction projects. Last month the New South Wales government moved to ban oil and gas exploration off its coast. But now oil and gas exploration may be about to start off the Victorian coast using seismic blasting, which will deafen whales and damage a whole range of marine life. Will the Victorian government follow the New South Wales example and put a stop to this?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question, and we are very proud to have strong targets as we transition towards renewable energy. In terms of the specifics of the project that he has made reference to, I will refer him to the minister for energy, who I am sure will be delighted to share a briefing with him.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:29): It is commonly stated that Victoria is running out of gas and needs more. The government has made the very wise step of banning connections to new homes for gas, but the next step to reduce gas consumption would be to ban the sale of new gas appliances, as explained by people like Saul Griffith, who say that we cannot afford to buy new fossil fuel burning appliances. Will the government act to stop the sale of new gas appliances?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30): Again I refer the member for Brunswick to the Minister for Energy and Climate Action. Climate action is what this government is taking when it comes both to the transition to renewable energy – ensuring that we have projects, ensuring that we have the transmission, ensuring that we have jobs – and also to taking other action to ensure that we are supporting secure energy supply here in this state. I will say to the member for Brunswick he would

have more credibility if he did not engage in the sorts of stunts we have seen occur from him and his colleagues in question times past. I will refer him to the minister for further information.

**Ministers statements: youth**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:31): I rise today to update the house on how young people are making an impact. I am proud to have welcomed 32 global young ambassadors to Melbourne as part of the Global Citizen Now summit. This summit brought together special guests like the Duchess of York Sarah Ferguson, Crowded House, Hugh Jackman and many more. These are change makers and advocates coming together to solve big issues. It was an honour to meet young leaders from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and New Zealand. These young people are making their mark.

The Allan Labor government is proud to be backing our young people, because we believe in opportunities regardless of your postcode, your surname, your background or your faith. We are making the investment where it is needed. That is why we are giving community organisations the support that they need so they can celebrate and continue to host events, such as Youth Fest grants, which are still open. I encourage all members to reach out to local organisations. These grants support young people to organise exciting projects and, most importantly, some sporting tournaments as well. Who knows, they could even organise a tennis tournament.

**Sam Groth** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Nepean can leave the chamber for an hour, without commentary.

**Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.**

**Natalie SULEYMAN:** On this side of the house we are investing in our young people so they can lift their local communities like trophies at the centre court. Whether you are born here or not, there is opportunity for all. Young Victorians are making a difference and making an impact, and we know that. The Allan Labor government is backing young people every step of the way. The Leader of the Opposition could learn something from Crowded House’s performance this evening: don’t dream it’s over.

**Housing**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:33): My question is to the Premier. Doug, a widower, and his two children, including his daughter Nova, who has cerebral palsy and uses a motorised wheelchair, have been waiting on the social housing list for four years. Last week, following a story on *A Current Affair* about the family’s plight, the government issued a statement claiming the family had been offered two homes. Does the Premier stand by this claim?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:33): The member for South-West Coast has raised a very specific example with particular details, and I will refer that matter to the Minister for Housing for further action and follow-up.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:34): In one week’s time Doug and his family may have no other option but to move back into an abandoned bus in a paddock. It is simply unacceptable that this vulnerable family is being left homeless. There are suitable properties available in Warrnambool. Will the Premier find Doug and his family a home tomorrow? I did refer it to the minister two weeks ago in this house. You know about it.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for South-West Coast, I would ask you not to use ‘you’ in the chamber. It is a reflection on the Chair.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): As I indicated in my previous answer, I will refer that matter to the Minister for Housing. I would appreciate the member for South-West Coast –

**Roma Britnell:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question is an important question that needs answering. Doug is waiting. His daughter is desperate. Can you please address the question and answer whether Doug can have a home in Warnambool tomorrow? They are there, waiting.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for South-West Coast, I ask for points of order to be succinct and to the point. The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will say this to the member for South-West Coast: I will extend to Doug and his family the dignity and respect that they deserve for these matters to be dealt with in a respectful way, not in the way that is being conveyed at present. I think it is important that we understand –

**Roma Britnell:** On a point of order, Speaker, I would like the minister to withdraw the fact that I was disrespectful; in fact I was quite the opposite. To maintain this family's dignity I went to the government first, before the press, because his dignity needed preserving. That was my initial aim.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. Did you request a withdrawal, member for South-West Coast?

**Roma Britnell:** Yes, Speaker, I requested a withdrawal.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for South-West Coast believes there was a personal reflection. I ask the Premier to withdraw.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** To assist the house, I withdraw, and I also refer the member for South-West Coast to the many examples of how, whether it is through the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, the additional \$1 billion that we are investing –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** You know what, Leader of the Opposition? It is working very well. Let me tell you what we have been doing since January of this year.

**John Pesutto:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I ask you to bring the Premier back to the question about Doug and his two kids.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** On the point of order, Speaker, I was being entirely relevant to the question that was asked. It looks like the future leadership of the Liberal Party is sitting up there in the back row.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The house will come to order! The member for Wendouree can leave the chamber for an hour. The member for Euroa can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Members for Wendouree and Euroa withdrew from chamber.**

**James Newbury:** On the point of order, Speaker, we are talking about someone who is about to be homeless. He and his family are about to be homeless. I would ask you to bring the Premier back, on relevance, to this important question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for South Barwon can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.**

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The question went to housing supply. I was about to go through – and time will not permit me to go through – the long list of actions that we have taken in the most recent months.

**John Pesutto:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is defying your ruling. This is about Doug. The question is about whether the Premier can get Doug and his two kids a home tomorrow. I appreciate the broader list –

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I know the Leader of the Opposition is embarrassed that he has blocked, not supported, more homes. We will continue to invest in more homes.

#### Ministers statements: volunteers

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): I am very pleased to thank on behalf of the house, for their hard work, volunteers right across Victoria, whether they are those frontline volunteers that we saw in recent weeks defending homes and properties and supporting communities across our state or the charities and faith groups who showed up, provided hot meals and offered support to those communities when they needed it the most. But also we know that there are Victorians every single day who provide great support to our community in op shops and charities, at local sporting clubs and in community organisations. I would like to say thank you to those Victorians for making our state a generous, welcoming and inclusive place to live.

Last week – and I know the minister for volunteering was also in attendance – there was a great recognition of the hard work of our volunteers at the 2023 Volunteering Awards. I would like to congratulate the Premier’s Volunteer of the Year, LGBTIQ+ advocate Caitlin Grigsby. Caitlin has worked in this area for the people of Gippsland to provide essential information and support. As a result of Caitlin’s great work, her dedicated work, Gippsland now has a thriving LGBTIQ+ organisation called Gippsland Pride Initiative. Also, more recently Caitlin co-authored the *Rainbow Brick Road Report*, which captures important data on Gippsland’s LGBTIQ+ community, and this is important because this data will in turn help better inform decisions and recommendations to further support the community in the Gippsland region. Volunteers like Caitlin play such a vital role in our community, and these awards are one way that we can recognise them and thank them for their service.

**Paul Edbrooke:** On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance and a possible ruling on a trend that has been creeping into questions, whether they be questions for ministers or constituency questions. Under standing order 57 the content of questions must not offer argument or an opinion on the matter or, most importantly, give facts or names of persons except those strictly necessary to explain the question. I was wondering if you could get back to me on that.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Frankston is welcome to come and see me in my office to discuss these matters.

#### *Constituency questions*

##### **Polwarth electorate**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:43): (540) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question I have is: could she please let me know when the Colac-Ballararat Road will be upgraded and repaired? Unfortunately, the Colac-Ballararat Road is one of the major north–south routes for the electorate of Polwarth. It is frequented by cattle trucks, grain trucks – all sorts of heavy traffic. It is also a major route for people, linking the Princes Highway at Hamilton and of course Ballarat to the Hamilton Highway.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Polwarth, would you like to rephrase the commencement of your constituency question with just the question.

**Richard RIORDAN:** When will the Colac-Ballararat Road between Ballarat and Colac be upgraded in order to make it a safe thoroughfare for the thousands of people that use that important road as a major route between the north and south and Polwarth?

**The SPEAKER:** I did not want to have to rule it out of order.

**Pakenham electorate**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (14:44): (541) My question is for the Minister for Education. I am aware that construction has commenced on the next new primary school in my electorate, Pakenham North West primary school – interim name – to open in 2025. What stage of construction has this new school project reached? This school received a share of the \$573 million in the 2023–24 state budget and will be the ninth new school in my electorate since we came to government in 2014. I recently attended the opening of another school in my electorate, Kurmile Primary School in Officer. Kurmile is a wonderful new school providing a state-of-the-art learning environment for families in Officer with absolutely beautiful facilities. My electorate is growing, and I am pleased that this government is continuing to invest heavily in education for my community.

**Murray Plains electorate**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (14:45): (542) My constituency question is to the Treasurer. I ask: why has the government changed the criteria that force thousands of my constituents to pay land tax for the first time? I look forward to seeing how the Treasurer will justify this latest blatant tax grab.

**Hastings electorate**

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (14:45): (543) Evie is a transgender woman who came to my office last week to talk about her experience at school. She told me that school was not a happy place for her, and in fact she had to move schools due to bullying. Unfortunately, the bullying was not just from students but also from some teachers. Evie really wanted to impress upon me that the reason behind her bullying was ignorance, and the only way to combat ignorance is to educate. So my constituency question is to the Minister for Education. What work is being done to educate trainee teachers, working teachers and school students around understanding and supporting transgender students in our schools? I asked my daughter who is a teacher what training she had when she went to university that dealt specifically with transgender students, and her reply was zero. Evie spoke about the need for better education to eliminate the ignorance and fear around transgender issues. She wants to empower trainee teachers, working teachers and students through education to better understand what transgender actually means.

**Sandringham electorate**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (14:46): (544) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The 825 bus route in my electorate is a service that provides crucial transport for many students at Beaumaris Secondary College as well as Mentone Girls' Secondary College and Sandringham secondary college. The principal at Beaumaris Secondary College, on behalf of a number of students, has recently expressed her concerns at the significant overcrowding on the 825 bus route, which is causing safety and accessibility challenges for hundreds of school students every single day. One of the students at Beaumaris Secondary, Amelia, shared her difficulty accessing the bus due to pushing and shoving. Her classmate Sofia shared that people are practically lying on top of one another. I want to put on record that I have already addressed these matters directly with the minister on two separate occasions last year, and to date no action has been taken by the government on behalf of those students. So I ask: how does the minister plan to address overcrowding on the 825 bus route?

**Broadmeadows electorate**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (14:47): (545) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question I ask is: has a safety assessment been undertaken at the intersection of Wheatsheaf Road and Plumpton Avenue in Glenroy since the substantial increase in vulnerable pedestrians crossing here to access the community hub? One of my proudest achievements from my time on council is the commencement of the \$30 million Glenroy Community Hub. It was a

great day celebrating its completion and the state government contribution with Minister Blandthorn and Minister Stitt. This magnificent space includes child care, kindergarten, maternal and child health, community health, the Glenroy Neighbourhood House, community meeting rooms and a wonderful new library set in the beautiful grounds of the Bridget Shortell Reserve, with a very well used park and playground. It attracts hundreds of residents a day, including many young children and people with mobility issues. I understand the intersection is the joint responsibility of council and state, but due to the difficulty these people face to cross safely and the increase in pedestrian demand it is important we work together. I thank the local resident – *(Time expired)*

**Richmond electorate**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:48): (546) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Constituents have contacted me about the Clifton Hill container deposit machine. One tried six different machines before trying Clifton Hill; none of them were functional. Another constituent had checked the app before visiting to make sure it was open, and after travelling with 50 containers found it to be out of order. In the short time I was there about 10 people came to use the machine only to have to be turned away. It is not just Clifton Hill. In Richmond and Abbotsford over-the-counter operators are turning people away. In Ivanhoe, Box Hill, Highett, Lakes Entrance, Mernda, Springvale and South Yarra the machines are often out of order. Some say the dysfunction is intentional. Minister, the Clifton Hill drop-off point, like many, is failing. What is being done to fix it?

**Kororoit electorate**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (14:49): (547) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. What plans are in place to further improve Rockbank station for our community? The communities of Rockbank, Mount Atkinson, Thornhill Park and Aintree are some of the fastest growing suburbs in Australia. With more people utilising the station the community is calling for additional modernisation of the station to accommodate this growth. From 3000 residents in 2016 to over 65,000 residents by 2026, the west is absolutely booming, and I want to ensure that our public transport reflects the passenger comfort and safety that the community expects and deserves.

**Nepean electorate**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:50): (548) My question is to the Minister for Children. Waterfall Gully kindergarten is one of the largest sessional kinders in my electorate, servicing about 150 families. Their three-year-old kinder room was licensed to hold 15 children, but high demand led to their sunroom being transformed from an outdoor space to an indoor space, allowing the kinder to have 22 children in that room at any one time. However, the sunroom facility faced issues with flooding, leaving it regularly out of action and forcing the other room to be full beyond the approved capacity. Local council initially undertook works to try and remedy this issue, but unfortunately the flooding soon returned with heavy downpours. Sadly, despite further works being desperately needed, council has gone quiet on plans to rectify this ongoing issue. When will the government intervene to ensure that those families with children at Waterfall Gully kindergarten have the facilities that their children need?

**Bayswater electorate**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:51): (549) One of the best things this government has delivered is the sick pay guarantee. In short, it is a scheme for hundreds of different jobs and thousands of workers across the state who are in eligible casual or contract work and do not have access to sick leave. This scheme means you do not need to choose between being able to pay the bills and keeping yourself and people around you safe, as it provides up to five days of sick leave per year. It is a nation-first scheme that is making a difference for so many, and I am proud to say that thousands of people have accessed thousands of hours of it. One of the best parts is that all of the admin work is done by us, freeing up businesses' time. My question is to the Minister for Employment: how many locals in Knox have accessed the sick pay guarantee pilot since its creation? And if you are watching this and want to check your eligibility, go to [vic.gov.au/sick-pay-guarantee](http://vic.gov.au/sick-pay-guarantee).

*Bills***Statute Law Revision Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:52): It is a privilege to rise on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024 after the break that we have had. There were some incredible contributions on this piece of legislation, including the effort from the member for Malvern in filling his allotted 30-minute time slot, as well as others.

I want to speak on a couple of the acts within this bill – first of all the Heritage Act 2017. I just want to call out and first of all recognise those locals out in Flinders who worked so hard a few years ago to make sure that the Flinders Pier was saved and achieved heritage listing. While it is fantastic that the pier has achieved that heritage listing, it still does need the investment to make sure that the wooden pier there has the upgrades, the maintenance to make sure it actually stays standing in the long term. It is something that that local community, as well as all those people that visit Flinders – there are a huge number of tourists that come down right throughout the year – can continue to be able to visit, that pier, and it is going to be standing for a long time to come. So can I just put on the record: yes, it is fantastic that it has achieved the heritage listing, and yes, the Save Flinders Pier group and everyone there with the Flinders Community Association have done an incredible job to highlight the need for that, but they certainly need to see also that investment in that pier now to make sure that it is going to be standing there for a long, long time to come.

Secondly, can I touch on the Gas Industry Act 2001. We on this side of the house recognise that gas is a fundamental part of Victoria's energy future and the future of energy security not just in my electorate but right across the state. We know that this Labor government have failed to commit to investing in increasing the supply of gas and securing a future for exploration for gas but also that they are cutting that supply, cutting gas as a whole. They are going to ban gas, especially recently, as we have seen, in those areas that need planning permits. Heading into the last election we had a comprehensive gas policy. We have been very, very clear on where we stand in terms of gas and its position as a transition into alternative forms of energy, renewable energy and the like, but we need to make sure that we do the transition into whatever comes in the future in terms of our energy supply in a sensible way. We certainly recognise on this side of the house that gas is an important part of that transition.

I also want to touch on the Road Safety Act 1986, which is one of I think – I do not know how many are in there – 11 or so acts as a part of this bill and the tidy-up. On the Mornington Peninsula we have an incredibly high number of road accidents. Over the last five years or so we have been number two or three in the state in terms of road fatalities, and we know, just like all over the state, we need investment in our roads. The number of potholes and roads that are falling apart in my electorate is incredible. I actually got a photo from someone locally recently who was travelling along Marine Drive, Safety Beach – and I would be happy to send the photo, not because I like seeing it – and I kid you not, the back wheels of their car ended up 4 to 5 feet off the ground, with the car in a pothole almost face down, if you can imagine, sort of looking vertical. The pothole situation on the Mornington Peninsula is out of control. In the past decade we have had 75 people killed on the Mornington Peninsula and over 1500 seriously injured. Many of the members in this chamber spend time in my electorate through holiday periods and on weekends. It is not just the locals that are dealing with these roads, it is also those many visitors that we see increase during the peak season.

Can I also put on record, when we are talking about road safety, the fantastic work that TRAG do. TRAG is the Teenagers Road Accident Group. The member for Mornington, who is not here at the moment, would also be able to speak to the fantastic work that this group does. The work they do is quite confronting. I have been to a couple of their presentations, and I would encourage many members

of this chamber to come down and see the work that they do or even see if there are groups doing similar work in their electorates. TRAG was formed back in 1999. They have spoken to more than 100,000 year 10, 11 and 12 students. They come in and deliver workshops. They work with the likes of Victoria Police, the ambulance services and the SES. But the really hard-hitting impact of what they do – they are actually family members and close friends of young people who have unfortunately lost their lives in tragic road accidents. It is quite graphic. It is quite confronting, the numbers that they produce and the images they produce for students who are 15, 16, 17 years of age. There is certainly a shock factor to what they do, but for young people, when they are first getting their licence and I think especially now, in 2024, there are so many more distractions in our vehicles than there have probably ever been before. I mean, we all have the little device that we hold in our hand; there are so many people we see on a day-to-day basis driving along holding that, and for young people it is a part of how they live their lives. That phone is attached to their hand almost every waking minute that they are out of bed and going through their day.

You are speaking to and hearing from mothers of daughters who have been killed. In my electorate I drive past regularly the corner of Boneo Road and Limestone Road out in Boneo and there is a cross on the side of the road, and I have heard that mother's story. As a parent it actually hits you; it hits you hard when you hear those stories. So I want to commend the work that TRAG does, but I would encourage members in this chamber: if you get the chance, reach out to them and find out about the work that they do. They do not just engage on the Mornington Peninsula, they engage right across the south-east. It is something we need to look at, that young person road safety and road safety awareness. So to TRAG, thank you very much for the work that you do.

This bill is going to sail through. It is going to fix up a comma here; I did appreciate some of the members' contributions about the Oxford comma. There you go; we do not want to see any of that happening. But I will note that this piece of legislation will sail through. It is incredible, the amount of people that want to speak to it, but I just wanted to put those couple of things on the record.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:59): I too rise to support the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. This is very much an omnibus bill, as we have heard, providing a mechanism for reviewing Victoria's statute books, and is required in order to ensure Victorian statutes remain clear, relevant and accurate. The bill makes minor and technical amendments to various acts, including updating references and correcting typographical errors. This serves the broader purpose of ensuring these acts remain relevant and accessible to the Victorian community. There have been some wonderful contributions. With a little bit to play with, people have got quite creative, including the member for Narre Warren South, whose contribution I refer members to. However, through my contribution on the bill I would really like to focus on the changes associated with the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013 and the Road Safety Act 1986 in the context of the role of our transport and freight sectors, who literally keep the country and the state moving, and the proud transport workers who are the heart and soul of the industry.

While these reforms may be considered minor or inconsequential in the scheme of the broader transport industry, there is certainly nothing minor or inconsequential associated with the role of transport and freight workers. Few Victorians fully appreciate the size and the scale of our freight, logistics and transport industry and the entire ecosystem that lies behind our everyday purchases or services. Whether it be the food you purchase from the supermarket, attendance at school, visits to the hospital, getting to work or when you take that much-earned holiday break via Melbourne Airport, all of these sorts of things would not be possible if it was not for the transport workers who helped deliver the goods to, firstly, construct these places and who continue to transport people and deliver the goods to support these spaces. We cannot take for granted that many of our products and services travel hundreds or thousands of kilometres on our roads, rail, sea or air. It really is something to thank the transport workers for through the entire supply chain. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, our economy can only operate and grow if we are able to move goods from

primary producers, manufacturers, wholesalers and importers to the consumer either at the shop or at home.

As set out in the Victorian Labor government's freight plan *Delivering the Goods*, our freight transport sector continues to be a central economic driver to our state's economic, jobs and skills prosperity. The freight and logistics sector is one of our most important sectors, contributing \$21 billion to the Victorian economy and employing around 260,000 Victorians. Across my community of Merri-bek the freight, logistics, warehousing and transport sectors make up over 2400 local businesses – that is almost 15 per cent of local businesses, the second-highest local business sector behind construction – and employ almost 4000 local residents, equating to 4.2 per cent of local employment for residents. In this respect I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and Minister for Ports and Freight the member for Williamstown in this place, who continues to do a tremendous job in steering the sector towards the future, and the Minister for Public and Active Transport too, who has an important role of course.

However, I would like to also acknowledge the work of the mighty Transport Workers' Union, the TWU, Victorian/Tasmanian branch, who now for over 120 years have continued to remain the collective voice for the men and women working across the Australian, Victorian and Tasmanian transport industries. First established as the Victorian Carters and Drivers' Union, which became the modern TWU, the union now represents over 90,000 employees and owner-operators nationally through a wide range of industries, including aviation, through pilots, ground services, catering and guest services; workers across all aspects of road transportation, from freight to logistics, including energy transportation; the private bus industry; and waste management. Over the years of course the TWU has been involved in some of the most important and iconic industrial disputes, always advocating in the best interests of members – for example, winning the right to two weeks paid annual leave back in 1945, surging its membership from 20,000 to 36,000 back in 1947 upon securing the 40-hour working week and pioneering industry super back in 1986 with the formation of the Transport Workers (Superannuation) Award 1986. Commendations to Matt Rocks, who to this very day still serves that fund very diligently. In 2012 the 20-year Safe Rates campaign culminated in the passing of groundbreaking legislation to establish the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal, which sadly was later disbanded by the previous Turnbull Liberal government and in recent times took on and won some of the most important industrial disputes in modern times, including against Qantas, and the passage of the closing the loopholes bill in federal Parliament, which I will touch on very shortly.

However, notwithstanding the positive contributions the transport and freight sector makes to our economy and the good work of the TWU, the fact remains that working in the transport sector, which this bill goes to the very heart of through reforms to the heavy vehicle act of 2013, remains one of the country's most dangerous jobs and sectors to work in. Australian road transport workers are, sadly, 10 times more likely to die at work than workers in other industries. Whether they are operating heavy freight trucks, they are owner-drivers – driving vans, cars and motorcycles – or they are gig economy workers who ride e-scooters or bikes, deteriorating safety standards across the industry have continued to compound safety issues for workers and indeed local communities through which they travel. As set out by the Transport Workers' Union submission and appearance by Nick McIntosh, the assistant national secretary, at the recent parliamentary inquiry into vulnerable road user safety – and I acknowledge the chair, who is the member for Bellarine, in that respect – since 2016 there have been over 1000 truck crash deaths, and over 250 of those deaths were truck drivers.

Transport is an industry marked by severe financial pressure from the corporates, including major retailers, manufacturers, energy companies, stevedores, freight forwarders and airports. The continued lowering of transport costs, including through the Amazon and the Uber effect, and increasingly late payment terms result in very tight margins and low capital flows through the industry and supply chains, which adds a significant impact on a number of safety issues, including wage theft and the non-payment of superannuation through the industry, which is sadly very rampant. A recent Safe Work Australia survey found 31 per cent of transport employers say workers ignore safety rules to get

the job done – that is, to fulfil the requirements imposed on them by their employers – 20 per cent of transport employers accept dangerous behaviour compared to 2 per cent in other industries, and 20 per cent of transport employers break safety rules to meet deadlines compared to just 6 per cent in other industries.

A federal department of infrastructure report in 2016 also noted that heavy trucks are disproportionately involved in casualty crashes. Approximately 16 per cent of road crash fatalities and 4 per cent of injuries involve these vehicles. The ABS data shows that trucks represent just 3.6 per cent of registered motor vehicles in Australia, yet trucking is the deadliest and most hazardous industry. That is why the TWU has been campaigning for over a decade for safe rates. We know that the safety of transport drivers on our roads is linked to the rates of pay and better conditions and standards for drivers but also to improving safety for all road and vulnerable road user communities.

The emergence of the gig economy has also escalated the significance of and the need for safe rates. The Amazon effect of the gig economy is dragging down rates, compliance and safety. Online platforms like Uber or Amazon provide insecure work and inadequate rights and protections for workers, which compromises the safety of drivers and all road users. Again, as we heard during the recent road safety inquiry, gig delivery drivers are people who access work through digital platforms that offer on-demand services – think of Uber Eats, DoorDash, Foodora and others. According to the evidence received by the road safety partners of the state government – and the member for Shepparton is of course part of that inquiry too as the deputy chair – the number of bike and motorcycle riders injured while working increased steadily between 2016 and 2020. Of the 19,707 bike riders and motorcyclists injured in police-reported collisions between 1 January 2016 and April 2021 whose journey purpose was recorded, 80 per cent of cases – 686 – were working at the time of the injury, and three of them lost their lives, very tragically, while working. The number of riders injured while working rose from 93 in 2016 up to 170 in 2020, and analysis of the motorcycle crash times, locations and rider profiles suggests a strong correlation between the growth of the food delivery industry and more motorcyclists on the road.

That is why I am so proud to report to the chamber that, after years of campaigning, only last month the TWU managed to deliver and secure the transport reform that is long overdue through the federal Parliament's Closing Loopholes legislation. The landmark reforms will mean the Fair Work Commission can set enforceable minimum standards for any sector of the transport industry and is a system for all TWU members, including owner-drivers and gig workers, ending the deadly squeeze from the top of supply chains and the Amazon effect by disrupting the entire industry. For getting this huge legislation from law into the workplace, I commend the TWU for all of the efforts of their members over many years.

In this respect I do pay tribute to the outgoing state secretary of the TWU Mike McNess, who for 30 years has diligently served the transport worker sector so well and achieved so much during his time, including landmark agreements with Toll; securing bus reform and same job, same pay legislation reform; the secure jobs, better pay legislation; and beating Qantas twice in the Federal Court and the High Court. In doing so I also acknowledge my very good friend Mem Suleyman, who has been elevated to the secretary role and will lead the union in very sturdy times indeed. He has been involved in quite a few negotiations to get good outcomes for members with Jetstar, StarTrack, Rivet, Saputo, Dysons, TGE, Searoad and Strait Link, and Mem really will be a steady hand at the wheel for the union. I commend Dissio Markos for his elevation to the position of assistant secretary. His passion for the transport sector started way back in 2005 with Qantas.

Of course this bill goes to quite a number of road safety reforms and heavy vehicle reforms too, which also touch on the entire supply chain. I genuinely do believe this is not an inconsequential bill in many ways, because the transport sector very much welcomes it.

**Chris CREWTHER** (Mornington) (15:09): I note that I have my son here just today. My wife is at a special meeting at her work. He normally does not go to preschool on Wednesday, so he has got to experience Parliament House here and even question time before.

I rise today to discuss the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, which makes a series of minor amendments to a number of acts to correct grammatical and typographical errors, to update references and for other similar purposes. As the member for Malvern noted earlier, it is like we do not have a cost-of-living crisis or a housing crisis or people lining up at food banks or struggling to pay their bills, to find rentals, to get into housing and so on. The government clearly does not have a strong legislative agenda to properly address these issues of critical importance to Victorians, and yet the government has decided during this time to bring in this bill to correct typographical errors in various acts, including the Building Act 1993, Docklands Act 1991, EastLink Project Act 2004, Forests Act 1958, Gas Industry Act 2001, Heritage Act 2017, Impounding of Livestock Act 1994, Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009 and Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013. The bill also repeals mistakenly duplicated items in the tables in sections 56 and 56B of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and updates the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 to reflect the change to the definition of 'building practitioner' in the Building Act made by the Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023.

In an attempt to create greater consistency and compliance with national building standards and to facilitate the ease of movement of labour, the Building Legislation Amendment Act expanded the definition of 'building practitioner' in section 3 of the Building Act. The new and amended categories include a building consultant, building designer, site supervisor and project manager. Overall it was about ensuring practitioners have the necessary skills or qualifications to carry out complex or high-risk work, including things like overseeing OH&S on sites and ensuring compliance with the National Construction Code. These measures were of course important in ensuring that constructions were being carried out with a high level of care, which I think is especially relevant today given that Victoria and the whole of Australia are suffering from a shortage of houses.

Indeed Victoria is at the heart of the housing shortage. In December last year 3559 new builds were given the green light, which was the lowest number of new builds for that month since 2011. Indeed this month is not an anomaly but part of a pattern that suggests a chronic housing shortage and indeed a crisis. Infrastructure Victoria has warned that Melbourne needs to build 44,000 new homes annually to accommodate an extra 3.1 million people by 2051. These are huge numbers that we are just not accomplishing at the moment, and with the current shortage of qualified professionals and construction companies to carry out these works, increasing housing supply is going to be even tougher. In this mad rush to build more homes it is also of great concern that rushing construction will significantly increase the risks to quality, like we have seen at places like Culcairn Drive in Frankston South, which the member for Brighton and I visited recently and whose residents and owners have been suffering for years.

While the act last year made a number of strides, it was also a missed opportunity for reform. Investment in proper building design and the accountability of those responsible for the management and execution of works are desperately needed in order to avoid the catastrophic consequences of dodgy builds. Indeed in Victoria there are nine different types of building practitioners, each with up to 30 different subtypes. We have building inspector, building inspector – pool, building surveyor, quantity surveyor, draftsperson, erector and supervisor of temporary structures, project manager, domestic builder and commercial builder. These terms are sometimes difficult to distinguish from one another, and their responsibilities are unclear. A potential solution, drawing on global practices, could be to enhance the minimum competencies expected of builders before they are granted licences. Furthermore, accountability for adherence to design standards during construction could be placed on architects and engineers with the necessary qualifications and expertise to approve final building works. As a result, before initiating a construction venture it could be mandatory for contractors to

demonstrate the presence of architects and engineers who assume individual liability and responsibility for the quality of their work.

This framework aims to strike a balance between the business interests of the company owners, who oftentimes prioritise costs and schedule, and the concerns of designers, who emphasise quality and user safety throughout the building process. Such a transition would rectify the current circumstances where the primary contractor, often acting as a project manager, holds minimal or lower responsibility and lacks adequate technical qualifications in many cases.

Indeed the Victorian building industry has been labelled a ‘wild west’ of noncompliance, which is not difficult to see. Last year hundreds of defective balconies were discovered during safety inspections of 339 buildings that received government funding, largely arising out of poor architectural design, defective construction or maintenance issues. In Melbourne’s CBD you hear stories all the time of residents in high-rise buildings fearing for their lives as their apartments creak. As mentioned just last month, I spoke to the residents of 5 Culcairn Drive in Frankston South, the owners there, with the building containing many defects, like balcony collapses, significant cracking, water leaks, rotted-out carpets and wall linings, mushrooms and black mould growing at an alarming rate, a collapsing underground car park that residents could not park in in the past and more. These residents have been going through these issues since 2018, and it is about time that the government intervenes to assist them. Moreover, I think this bill provides us with the opportunity to reflect on these matters, and the definition changes to ‘building practitioner’ are a step in the right direction. But we need to be smarter about how we tackle these problems, which I predict will get much worse over the years.

Moving on to the specifics of this bill, we also have an amendment to the Safety on Public Land Act 2004 to remove a reference to another provision of that act, which was repealed by the Sustainable Forests (Timber) and Wildlife Amendment Act 2014.

Finally, the bill also makes various updates to the Road Safety Act 1986, including amending a reference in section 84(2)(ea) to a provision which has been moved by the Transport Legislation (Amendment) Act 2004 and repealing definitions of terms which are no longer used either in the act or in regulations made under the act. These are important tidy-ups that ensure that these acts are up-to-date and fit for purpose.

I cannot help being a little facetious with this one. It is a great shame that the Labor government does know how to tidy up a Road Safety Act but does not know how to tidy up the roads on the Mornington Peninsula and indeed in the Mornington electorate. In particular I will address the Forest Drive and Uralla Road intersection upgrades with the Nepean Highway, which Mornington constituents and locals have been waiting for for many years. For context, these intersections in Mount Martha are incredibly dangerous and notorious, resulting in death, serious injury and fear over the years. Even just recently, over the last few weeks, we have had more incidents. The community can no longer afford to wait on these upgrades, which the state Labor government needs to build with the funds provided years ago by the former federal Liberal government.

Locals continue to be let down by substantial delays on these projects and excuses by the state government, who have kept on pushing back the deadlines for this project. This was exacerbated by the Albanese federal Labor government including both projects in their 90-day review for potential scrapping of the funding for these two intersection upgrades altogether. Funds, though, were fortunately maintained after the review went for around 200 days. But during that period no contracts could be entered into, and I understand that contracts were ready to be entered into just before the 90-day review was commenced, so that has further delayed the project by at least 200 days. Locals should not have to drive through these intersections every day, with the fear in the back of their minds of being in a serious car crash or injuring themselves or potentially dying. Locals are fed up and want urgent action on this project now. I eagerly await the Minister for Roads and Road Safety’s response to my representation sent to her on 29 February this year, which has followed many other representations I have made on behalf of many constituents in my electorate on this issue.

To wrap things up, while bills like the one we are debating today may not seem of huge significance, it is important that we ensure that Victorian legislation remains open and accessible to the Victorian community by correcting errors and problems in it, ensuring that these problems are not revisited in acts into the future.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (15:18): I rise today excitedly to speak about the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, like everyone else that was excited speaking about it, so I will just add to the excitement of this bill. As I get started I would like to acknowledge the work of the Minister for Government Services and her team and of course the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, who do not get enough acknowledgement in regard to all the hard work that they do behind the scenes in drafting and publishing our legislation. I preface this contribution with the acknowledgement that some of my staff in my office were absolutely thrilled going through the legislation looking for the typos, and it is a good day in the office when your staff are happy about doing that one. I am sure I will have to pay for that at a later date.

I was amused during the member for Malvern's contribution and at his attitude earlier in that it struck me how long it has been since they have been in government and it brought a bit of a smile to my face. I understand why he found it difficult to fill in 30 minutes in regard to this bill, but he did pad it out to then, and good luck to him and well done.

I want it on the record, on the assertion of my good friend the member for Sandringham, that we are not banning the Bunnings barbecue. It is utter nonsense what he was raising. We are not banning LPG. It is just ridiculous to even assert that. We know that the member for Sandringham likes a snag, and we know he likes to sneak down to Bunnings and get a snag down there, so I can assure him it will be okay; he can still continue to do that.

We often have the opportunity to look at and improve bills in this place. That fixes some uncertainties, clarifies some terminology, updates that terminology and identifies improvements, and of course we fix mistakes. This bill of course makes sure that our laws here in Victoria are clear and current. It makes them easier to enforce, and it is regular maintenance to keep everything running smoothly. As mentioned before, this bill will make amendments to 13 separate acts, including the Building Act 1993, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. Much like every statute law revision bill, this bill aims to clarify our existing legislation by updating references and correcting grammatical and typographical errors, ensuring the relevance and accuracy of our legislation. We are removing unnecessary semicolons, and we are cleaning up sentences – it is almost like being back at school, isn't it, the things that we are doing here. But anyway, there is a fair bit to do, and of course we were reminded of the importance of the Oxford comma. For those who missed the member for Narre Warren South's contribution, I do have an infographic that will help people to understand that and the importance of that, so if anyone wants to see that infographic later, they can always come and see me. I should table it, but I will not. But you can always come and have a look at it if you wish.

This statute law revision bill is incredibly important because it helps keep our laws clear, easy to understand and fair for all Victorians, and the bill will make amendments to correct typographical, as I said, and grammatical errors. I will go through some of the acts that it will refer to and amend, and they are the Building Act 1993, which was Kennett's legislation; the Forests Act 1958, which was Bolte's legislation; the Impounding of Livestock Act 1994, which was Kennett's legislation; and the Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013, which was Baillieu–Naphthine legislation. There will be an update in the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, which was Kennett's legislation, and in that particular act that reflects changes to the definition of 'building practitioner' in the Building Act 1993 made by the Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023. There are many other acts – the Safety on Public Land Act 2004, which was Bracks's legislation – and we could go on about others.

It took longer than 10 minutes to read this bill, obviously, so I just picked a few speaking points out of it. As I say, we come back to just rectifying some of the errors or the typographical errors that are in

the acts, particularly the Building Act 1993 and the Domestic Building Contracts Act, and of course, as I referred to earlier, the changes were made by the Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023. Having affordable housing, transport, education, health, entertainment and other infrastructure is essential. A productive and efficient building industry is vital to achieve these outcomes, and a thriving building industry creates these important places where Victorians live, work, build and share their personal and family experiences together.

Of course our building industry is so important. It contributes about \$40 billion per annum to the Victorian economy, and it keeps over 350,000 Victorians in jobs across more than 125,000 businesses, so we can see how important it is. While we are talking jobs, I just want to remind the house that we hit our target of 400,000 jobs two years early, and that was a remarkable effort. I think earlier today the Treasurer referred to something like 700,000 jobs that have been created in this state, and that is incredible; that is a great news story for the state of Victoria.

We invested more than \$44 billion during the pandemic to protect Victorian lives, to save jobs and businesses, and more than \$13 billion in business support and paving the way for our strong economic recovery. Of course our population here in Victoria grew by 1.7 per cent over the year to September 2022, and we have the fastest growing economy in the nation. I think if we refer back to that time of the pandemic, those opposite us were claiming that the sky was going to fall in in Victoria, no-one would come to Victoria and we would never attract another big event. Well, I think that has been so far off the mark and been proven wrong just in the last couple of years. We are, in all avenues across the nation, leading every other state.

The Allan Labor government aims to deliver, as we know, a massive 800,000 new homes across the state over the next 10 years, and *Victoria's Housing Statement* focuses on five key areas to tackle the housing supply problem: reforming the planning system, building homes closer to community infrastructure to reduce urban sprawl, protecting renters' rights, building more social and affordable housing and looking ahead to plan for the future. With Victoria set to be home to more than 10 million people by 2050, it is essential that we have skilled construction workers to ensure Victorians have safe, livable homes. We are ensuring the next generation of the workforce receive high-quality training through 6300 fee-free places in construction TAFE courses. I know Melton is one of the fastest growing areas in this state, if not the country, and it makes sense that we will have a construction-focused TAFE located in Melton over the next few years. The Allan Labor government has contributed \$55 million to the building of a TAFE campus in Melton to be run by Bendigo Kangan Institute to provide for 600 construction training positions each year, and that will be fantastic for not only Melton but Victoria and right across my patch in the western suburbs.

I have some history with some dodgy developers around my particular area and the promises that they have made to purchasers in regard to providing footpaths, roads, overpasses onto freeways and railway stations. They made these promises and never delivered, because they do not deliver some of those things. Some of them are council delivery, but overpasses onto freeways and delivering new railway stations is not what they do. Of course then they walk away from the development, and they leave it to the state government to patch up the problems.

We saw issues in regard to developments happen after former Minister for Planning Mr Guy absolutely hung Footscray out to dry, and I notice the member for Footscray is here. It has taken years for the Maribyrnong council to get on top of the Joe road site. That was not fair to the Footscray people, to the ratepayers, to the new residents or to the workers that had to build the infrastructure with no power, water or roads. I know my friend the member for Footscray has raised these concerns here on many, many occasions, and I am raising them again on her behalf and highlighting the problems of poor planning under a previous minister. There were dangerous worksites, and I will put my union cap on proudly: once again, the easiest way to save money on WorkCover – and I have raised this recently – is not to allow workers to be injured. That is our easiest way to do it. This bill is important, and I am pleased to commend it to the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:28): I am looking forward to the opportunity to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, which is an absolute ripsnorter of a piece of legislation. But I should actually, jokes aside, echo the comments of the member for Melton in thanking the parliamentary counsel. I did not exactly pick up what the member for Melton was saying, but I am wondering who exactly has the job of going through and finding these errant commas and double full stops and the like. One of my colleagues and I were just talking about this. I assume it is the kind of thing where you have a rolling Word document that you just add all these things to, and then parliamentary counsel emails every department and says, 'Have you got any mistakes you need fixed up?' I am sure one of the future government speakers might like to enlighten me on exactly how this occurs. It is very difficult to speak a lot about full stops and additional words and the like, but it does give me an opportunity to speak about some of the bills that are here.

I just want to target a couple of the issues pertinent to my electorate in particular with respect to the bills that are being amended in minor ways through this legislation. But first, on a broader picture – absolutely the housing crisis issue is one in my electorate, but it is broader. The bill amends both the Building Act 1993 and the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995. I was interested to hear the Minister for Planning in question time trying to defend the government's housing plan and talking about creating the 'right environment for developers to build homes'. It is difficult in question time to be able to rebut some of the points that are made, but I wonder if the minister could explain how adding additional taxes – the windfall gains tax, the additional land tax under the debt recovery plan that the government introduced last year – is helping to create an environment where people would want to invest in property. I note, as I have done a number of times in this place, that of the 53 new or increased taxes introduced by this government since 2015 around half of those have been property taxes. For the government to now say, 'Oh, it's just unbelievable. We've got this property crisis, this housing crisis, both a rental and a housing affordability crisis,' is fundamentally bizarre. The government does not understand that if you tax housing, if you make it more expensive and if you make it more difficult for rental providers to pay their bills because you are increasing land tax so much, that is going to be passed through to the people who are trying to pay rent and buy houses. This is one of the most fundamental problems of the government not understanding the simple economics that goes with this.

Likewise coming out of question time is the issue of the timber industry, and this is one particularly close to my heart. This legislation amends the Forests Act 1958. We have seen laid bare today the failure again of the government's forestry policy, not simply in the loss of jobs at the Maryvale mill, where Opal announced yesterday a further 220 jobs sadly will be going from the Opal business in Australia and New Zealand, and a very large number of them, I understand, from Maryvale. But why I am raising that is because although that is obviously a decision of a private company, the Maryvale mill was central to the government's decision-making on the forestry industry. Indeed, members will recall when the then Premier announced the end of the forestry industry in 2019 he did it at a radiata pine plantation nursery in my electorate, highlighting that his decision was all about the Maryvale mill. Indeed when he copped some criticism from a union, from the CFMEU, from Michael O'Connor, he came out the next day, the then Premier, and he said, and I quote from the *Age* on 10 November 2019:

The notion that this package does anything other than secure up to 1000 jobs in Australian Paper is simply wrong and I can quote you the chief operating officer ... who made it very clear: these jobs are secure. Up to 1000 jobs at that Maryvale mill, up to 2050.

The Premier, I highlight, was talking about Australian Paper, and in particular the plantation sector, because he knew that the government decision was shutting down the broader hardwood industry and would result in job losses there, particularly among the harvest and haul contractors and particularly among a number of the mills. So he hung his position on the Maryvale mill and said that those thousand jobs would stay.

At the end of 2022, 200 jobs were lost when Australian Paper actually closed its white paper manufacturing line, and again today we understand at least another 45 of the 220 jobs to be lost across the Opal business will be at Maryvale. That is an absolute indictment on the government's policy. It

made this policy decision to shut down the timber industry knowing that it would hurt the native hardwood sector but tried to spin it to say that it is protecting the thousand jobs in the Latrobe Valley. It has done nothing of that. Indeed the facts are on the table now. It is looking like a quarter of those jobs that the Premier said were secure up to 2050 have already gone. If that is not a failure of government policy and a failure of the people of Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley, then I do not know what is.

Continuing on a similar theme and as the neighbouring electorate to Latrobe Valley – and indeed parts of my electorate now are in Latrobe City – this bill also amends the Gas Industry Act 2001. The Gippsland South electorate is home to the vast bulk of gas production; about 95 per cent of Victoria's gas comes from Bass Strait and comes via the Longford plant in my electorate, just south of where I live. We are facing the wind-down of that. There is no question there is going to be probably slightly more than a decade of gas production, depending on exploration and any finds that there might be between now and then – and that is always an open question. But we are certainly winding down. But there are other opportunities to supply energy to our region, and they cross both my electorate of Gippsland South and that of the member for Morwell here as well, one of which of course is the HESC project, the hydrogen energy supply chain project. That is a project which will turn brown coal into hydrogen, and it will be blue hydrogen in the sense that the carbon from that process will be captured and pumped into my electorate out to Bass Strait into natural formations under the sea.

We have got in this place the absolute policy cretins of the Greens, who are opposed to this project, and they like to say that the Labor government is supporting another coal project. Well, I really do not understand their concern with coal if you are capturing the carbon emissions, because that is what it is all about, isn't it? Isn't it about burning coal being the concern because it causes global warming and therefore impacts the global climate? Well, if you are capturing the emissions and putting them back where they came from – that is, under the ground – what is the problem? Either the Greens do not seem to understand that or – and I suspect this is more likely – they deliberately avoid and ignore it. In fact I have heard it time and time again in this place when they simply say things like 'Carbon capture and storage doesn't work; it's never been done.' It has been done all over the world. There are so many projects either operating now or under development with carbon capture and storage, and it is virtually universally accepted that the Gippsland Basin has some of the best formations, the best geology, for capturing that carbon.

We should get behind the HESC project, because it will actually help Gippsland set up a hydrogen industry, one that will eventually have the opportunity to utilise the proposed offshore wind farms. When they are blowing away in the middle of the day and we have got sunlight on all our solar panels, what do we do with them? We might turn that production through electrolysis into hydrogen. And yet the Greens, who are supposed to be about supporting the environment – and I must say their fellow traveller the Minister for Energy and Resources in the government – are dead opposed to this project just because it involves coal. They ought to be hung out for that, like the Australia Institute, which put out a ridiculously misleading report a couple of years ago and were still banging on about it on ABC Gippsland a couple of weeks ago, saying that this project will create more emissions but completely ignoring the fact that if it goes ahead to commercial scale, it will have to involve carbon capture and storage. They stand condemned for this rubbish.

There is so much more I could say on this wonderful piece of legislation. Sadly, I am running out of time. Roads is just an issue that I could talk about for days in this place, given the appalling state of our roads in this state, but I commend the bill to the house.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (15:38): I am very pleased to speak on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, and it has certainly been an education, watching the speakers before me and how they were able to draw out the most interesting things from such a bill. This bill, and the type of bill it is, is important. It is like servicing your car or doing a weekly tidy-up. It is what we need to do to keep our house in order so that when the time comes for the larger pieces of legislation, there is no misunderstanding or confusion or mishap with other pieces of legislation. It is good and right that we

are doing this work. I think the member for South Barwon felt that it meant we were tired. I feel like it shows that we have got so much energy we can even do the housework as well as building the houses, so that is pretty good.

There has been a bit of talk about grammar today, and I just would like to put on the record my support for the Oxford comma. I believe it is absolutely necessary and appropriate. Language should and does change over time. We know how important grammar and commas are. The basic sentence ‘I love baking, my family and my friends’ can really change based on the placement of the comma.

**Danny O’Brien** interjected.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** ‘Let’s eat grandma’, the member for Gippsland South says. Let us do it. I mean, we have got only a few hours till dinner, so book it in! I am glad that the people who paid the best and closest attention in English classes are doing the work to make sure that our bills are perfect and do what they are intended to do.

One of the acts that is amended through this bill is the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. We have heard quite a bit from those opposite about energy through the course of this debate. The original 2007 act allowed us to establish the Victorian energy upgrades program. This has been a very successful program to help us reach our progressively ambitious targets for renewable energy and for net zero emissions. This particular program meant that households could not only contribute to our state being a clean and green state but they could also save themselves money. It has also produced lots of chatter on community Facebook groups. It is probably about once every three weeks that the post will come up: ‘There’s a person walking around on the street. I thought you should know.’ People get concerned, but it is actually just lovely people doing their job. I have certainly had them at my home – had all the globes replaced, support with the vents for the ducted heating and the like – and it certainly did make a difference for us. For any people that have not benefited from this scheme, I would certainly encourage them to, because it reduces energy bills and it reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Actually, energy savings from the program are expected to reduce Victoria’s electricity consumption by 7 per cent in 2025. For a humble-seeming program, that is quite a contribution. Of course this is all in aid of the transition that we are making as a state to renewable, clean, green power.

But what we are hearing from those opposite is just baseless fearmongering. I did like the alliteration from the member for Sandringham: banning the Bunnings barbecue. I thought those English pedants would also appreciate that alliteration. However, the science students would not be impressed because the facts are wrong. There is no banning of LPG-powered barbecues – nothing of the sort. In fact going all electric is a major cost-of-living support, saving Victorians thousands on energy bills for decades to come. Converting an existing home with solar panels from gas to electricity can save around \$1700 per year.

That is a lot of Bunnings barbecue sausages, absolutely hundreds of sausages from Bunnings. So for the member for Sandringham, who says we are banning the Bunnings barbecue, and the member for Nepean, who says we are banning gas: fear not, because your constituents are running towards electric. People are voting with their feet and with their wallets. People are already converting. The Victorian people are leading the way, and the opposition are trailing behind, mumbling something about nuclear reactors, and nobody is quite sure what they are doing. The Victorian government will continue to support putting more money back in the pockets of Victorians wherever it can, absolutely.

This bill also seeks to make changes to acts related to the building industry, the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 and the Building Act 1993. Of course it was not long ago in this house that we looked at domestic building contracts and put through the Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023. That introduced two new offences for builders who take deposits from customers without taking out insurance as soon as that money changes hands prior to the construction of building, and this work was really important. We saw today a further announcement by the government that it would provide support for people who have been caught out

by builders not taking out the necessary insurance for their customers. I was really pleased to see that that support has been extended by the government to them up until February 2024. Certainly that will be a great relief for people in my electorate who have lost their deposits recently to such builders.

We are working to tidy up aspects of the building industry, but it is part of our broader work around delivering 800,000 new homes over the next 10 years, and we have set out in our housing statement how we intend to do that. We are looking at making faster decisions. We heard in question time from the minister about how many additional applications have been put through planning through some initiatives that have been undertaken. We are absolutely protecting renters' rights and ramping those up, recognising that for some people renting is their personal choice or might be their circumstance but that does not mean that they should not have the rights and protections that people who own their home enjoy.

I am really excited, especially for the area that I represent, about additional 60-square-metre homes on properties, because there are larger blocks in my area. I really appreciate when my mother-in-law cooks dinner for us, so if it means that we need to build her a place out the back, I would definitely do it for her spaghetti. I am sure lots of other people want to be close to other generations of their family and will look to take that up.

When I looked across the acts that this bill is making small amendments to I noticed that so many of them relate to our free TAFE courses. If you wanted to work in the types of industries that we are talking about through this bill, you could have a free TAFE course – in agriculture, for example, or horticulture, building surveying, civil construction – (*Time expired*)

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (15:49): Today I rise to make a contribution on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024. It has been interesting to see the broad range of contributions in the chamber today. The purpose of the bill, as we know, is to revise the statute law of Victoria, for which the bill makes minor amendments to a number of acts to correct grammatical and typographical errors, to update references and for other similar purposes. This is a regular mechanism that is used for reviewing the state's statute books, and it is required to ensure that Victoria's statutes continue to remain clear, relevant and accurate for Victorians. The bill corrects typographical errors in various acts, such as the Building Act 1993, the Forests Act 1958, the Gas Industry Act 2001, the Heritage Act 2017 and the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009.

The bill also repeals several definitions in the Road Safety Act 1986. Whilst we refer to the Road Safety Act, I thought I would also reference just some of the issues happening within my electorate in regard to road safety. In the past few weeks there has been a very strong focus in my electorate regarding road safety and the alarming increase in road fatalities. As a state we are experiencing the highest death toll in 15 years. I met with RoadSafe Goulburn Valley for a roundtable discussion recently and they raised many concerns, including the alarming death toll, the appalling state of our roads and the substantial cuts to road safety programs. In fact Labor has cut, as we know, a staggering \$230 million from road safety programs, and there has been a 45 per cent reduction in our road maintenance since 2020. I acknowledge the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the chamber, and I also acknowledge the hard work that the shadow minister has been doing, particularly across regional electorates. Unsafe roads continue to be a major issue regarding road safety, with dangerous potholes and crumbling, deteriorating roads.

I put a call out to my constituents recently to share the locations of the worst roads that they have experienced, and the response was overwhelming. The response from Brad, a local, was 'there are too many to mention'. He also shared that he had hit a pothole and had to pay for a new rim and tyre and then another tyre in another incident. Brad said this cost him over \$700 and 'thank goodness for Foodbank at the Shepparton community house'. Vehicle damage is impacting many, causing added financial stress. We are seeing speed reduction signs up as a warning that you are coming up to a pothole, and signs have been up for months, with no work progressing. The Murchison-Tatura Road is a classic example, with signage being up since May last year. This is a major truck route and has

been raised as one of the most deteriorating roads in my electorate. There is a responsibility from the government to be fair and equitable with road maintenance and road maintenance funding.

In addition the bill repeals mistakenly duplicated items in the tables in sections 56 and 56B of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. Whilst we are talking about energy efficiency, we witnessed more than 500,000 homes and businesses without power, with some up to today with no power, following recent storm events. Victorians are struggling to pay record power bills, and there has been a 25 per cent increase in power costs this past year alone. The cost of living is having a significant impact on people's lives and Victorians are facing another tough year, all because Labor does not have a plan to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Furthermore, the bill updates the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 to reflect a change to the definition of 'building practitioner' in the Building Act 1993 made by the Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023. Home building in Victoria has dropped to its lowest rate in almost three decades. The ambitious target of 80,000 houses per year for the next 10 years must be allocated fairly. We have a housing crisis, and my electorate has one of the highest rates of homelessness across the state. We have 2335 people on the housing waiting list, and we are trying to attract professionals to our region to fill the shortages in a range of much-needed skills. GV Health have 500 advertised positions, but how do we get people to the region when there is no housing?

Just this past week I was contacted by a constituent who has been living in a shed for nine years – a shed on a block – following a fire in the rental property where she was living. This property is now leaking; it has holes and just last week she had the entrance of snakes into the building. These are pensioners, and they are people that desperately need help when it comes to housing. I also want to acknowledge a local organisation, People Supporting People, and Azem and his team, who I volunteer for when I can and who are helping the homeless and doing all that they can to provide sleeping bags, clothing and food – a job that should not be theirs.

The Heritage Act 2017 is also included on the list, and it is worth acknowledging the importance of preserving our heritage and history. Over the years we have seen many heritage buildings lost. We have also seen the perseverance of people in actually knocking down buildings, so we need to make sure that we preserve heritage and history. The Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009 is also listed. I have raised many times in the chamber the Shepparton bypass, a project that the state government committed \$10.2 million to in the business case back in the 2017–18 budget and a further \$1 million in the 2023–24 budget. The state government must stay committed to this project. This is a major project for our region, with over 25 per cent of the state's trucks registered in the Greater Shepparton region. It is extraordinary that we have to keep fighting for this bypass.

As a result of the bill making minor and technical amendments to various acts by updating references and correcting typographical errors, the bill serves its broader purpose. Whilst I could go and talk about grammatical errors and some extra commas being added, I think I will finish my contribution there, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (15:54): I also rise to make a contribution on the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, and as I think most members would know, the Victorian Parliament regularly considers and passes statute law revision bills to correct ambiguities or minor omissions, any errors, but also of course to reflect changes based on experience. This helps to ensure that Victorian statutes are up to date and clear and facilitates the administering of Victorian laws. Some of the previous opposition speakers have in a sense mocked the introduction of such a bill, but it is serious business amending legislation when use and experience have highlighted deficiencies or change is required because of changes in things such as technology, maybe attitudes, methods and procedures, because really the law in a sense is a living thing and is shaped by practice and experience.

In saying that, of course it does not mean that there is a lot to debate within the context of the specific changes and amendments, but this bill will amend various acts. I think on my count it is over 13 pieces

of legislation that we are debating today that will be amended as a result of the passing of this legislation. These are changes or amendments to rectify things that were either omitted or a typo or, as I said, to reflect different processes and procedures, but it is also legislation that has been made under both Liberal and Labor governments in the past.

There is a long list of the different acts that are being changed. I will not go through each of them, other than to say there are over 13 of them. They go from some of our really important infrastructure projects, because really every government service is facilitated by some sort of legislation, to legislation in here that we are making minor amendments to that, for example, provide better consumer protections, plus the Road Safety Act 1986 and many others. The government aims to identify and correct these minor changes as soon as possible through these bills, and this maintains the quality of Victorian legislation and ensures that laws remain up to date and are very clear. This bill ensures that there is accuracy and clarity as the government tries to defend the law and deliver state programs and policies, because as I said earlier, pretty well all the things that a government does are backed up or based on or implemented through some sort of legislation and then subsequent regulations and so on.

Because there is not a lot to talk about in terms of those individual minor amendments, I would like to talk about some of the programs and the really important work that the Allan Labor government does – what we are doing and will do – to ensure that we are making better lives for Victorians. I will give a couple of examples. The Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, which is one of the pieces of legislation that will be amended for minor changes, flows into the Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023, which provides protections for homebuyers – consumers that are purchasing homes. I guess what comes to mind when I think about how legislation affects residents of the Thomastown electorate, for example, is the terrible situation with the Porter Davis collapse. That business had not provided the important insurance that each consumer needs, so people were left without insurance and therefore their hard-earned savings. The money that they had scraped together to put a deposit on a home or a down payment had basically just disappeared into thin air. It was the government that responded by supporting those homebuyers and providing some sort of compensation payments that covered the insurance payments. I think that has now been extended. I think there was an announcement in fact today that those –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance. The member will have the call when the matter is next before the Chair.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Matters of public importance*

#### **Education**

**The SPEAKER** (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Niddrie proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house notes that Victoria is the Education State, with the Allan Labor government implementing a range of policies to ensure all students get the best start in life.

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (16:01): Education is not just a nice thing to invest in, it is the single most important public investment in our future. On this side of the chamber we know any conversation about opportunity must include education, the most fundamental building block to success. Nelson Mandela once said, ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,’ and no doubt those words are so apt and true as I speak on my feet right here and right now.

In the Education State every child deserves a good-quality education no matter where they live or what size or how much they have in their bank account. We know it is the most important tool to ensure every child has the best possible start in life and to support their aspirations. That is why our Labor government has built more schools than any other state. We know it is difficult to inspire students on

the relevance and importance of education if the school around them is falling down. That is why we have invested a record more than \$14 billion in building our schools, upgrading schools more than any other state or territory across our nation. That is why Victorian kids are at the top of their class according to NAPLAN. That is why we want every child to aspire, because we value education.

Just last week I spoke to more than 100 leaders at our annual Education State forum. First and foremost, I shared my thanks to them for the work they have done through the recent pandemic and are doing today – teachers, parents, business managers, volunteers, principals and many more. That is why it is the work of every one of my colleagues to recognise how important it is to make sure every child, each of whom is unique, gets the education they deserve.

It was very humbling to see the recent report by the Productivity Commission on government services, and if you just go through it, what the Productivity Commission report showed is that the Victorian government's total recurrent investment in schools has grown faster than any other jurisdiction. Victoria's investment per student has grown at a higher rate than any other jurisdiction. Victoria leads the country on proportion of school leavers fully engaged in education or work. School attendance rates continue to be above the Australian average, and Victoria continues to rank first for secondary school attendance. Victoria has the second-highest year attainment rate behind South Australia for year 12. Our record and our strong investments are paying dividends as I speak. We have strong and skilled teachers at our core.

Over the last 10 years our government has reshaped government schools. I know I do not have all the time in the world, but let me just go through what we have been able to deliver for the next couple of minutes: mental health practitioners, the Schools Mental Health Fund, the Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships, doctors in secondary schools and the Navigator program. We are supporting disadvantaged students through the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund; the tutor learning initiative; affordable school uniforms; free period products in all government schools; free school breakfasts, recently celebrating the 4 millionth with a wonderful event I did with the Premier and the member for Tarneit; Glasses for Kids; and school Smile Squad. One of my favourite programs is our out-of-school-hours care program, which is really supporting young people but also their parents and students with disabilities, extending out-of-school-hours care so those students are in a familiar setting that they know. Then it is helping young parents and, on the eve of International Women's Day, young mothers in particular to go and take on additional study or additional work. It is great. It has got that double dividend of helping the young people and helping their parents as well. That is what social policy, the care economy and the education system are all about, and that is why we value what we are doing.

We have got the student excellence program, the primary mathematics and science specialists, we have got the reduced face-to-face teaching hours program, the active schools program and we have got the additional school nurses and allied health services program. We have also established the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership – and it was wonderful for me to be able to host all the education ministers from around the nation recently at the academy and also to pay tribute to my predecessor James Merlino, who set that academy up, where we celebrated more than 150 years of public education in our state. That is a lasting legacy for the former Deputy Premier and member for Monbulk. I know the current member for Monbulk is following in his footsteps, always in my ear advocating for her local schools. As a former teacher in Monbulk, what a fantastic segue to have the new member for Monbulk in here doing a fantastic job.

I spoke about new schools – not 10, not 11, not 12, but I opened 14 new schools literally over the past month. It has been a very busy period, but that is what happens when you have a Labor government, the Allan Labor government, investing \$14.9 billion in schools. We are very proud of what we have been able to do. Fourteen new schools have increased the capacity across our state for an additional 9000 students, particularly in our growth suburbs, which I know many members in this chamber are so passionate about. We are very proud of this. The member for Kalkallo Minister Spence, the Premier and I were there on the very first day at Yubup Primary School in Mickleham with principal Maree Moyle. She took us on an exclusive tour of the new school. It was wonderful also to be with the

member for Kororoit and see that wonderful school the Dharra School, one of the new special schools, located in Aintree. And the member for Kororoit will agree with me about just that special feeling you get when you are at a specialist school and you see the parents, the faces – what it means to them having a government put their shoulder to the wheel investing more than \$1.8 billion on inclusive education to give those young people and their parents every start we can. I was also very proud to visit the Kurmile Primary School on the other side of town, in Officer. I have been there with the member for Pakenham – I do not know if she is in the chamber. We have been there twice already. It is only a brand new school and we have been there twice – that is how well we respect education and principal Sharon Mitchell for what she is doing.

There are school openings but also school modernisations. Since we have come to government we have delivered more than 1940 school upgrades. There is a \$2 billion investment in schools in the recent budget, and we are doing everything we can through a \$356 million investment for 47 upgrades and modernisation projects. We are also investing \$10 million for minor capital works to ensure that all of our schools get the start and all of our students get every opportunity in through the school gates.

I touched before on the inclusive education and what it means for every family and every student. There could be nothing more important. Our government has invested \$1.6 billion over four years – \$690 million invested in disability inclusion. Many people on this side of the chamber will remember the former Premier's speech at the campaign launch when he talked about the SEC. The other thing the former Premier the former member for Mulgrave spoke about was the outside school hours care program that I touched on. That is a game changer that we are rolling out. It will make a big difference to parents and to young people. Disability inclusion is about capability building, and that is what we are about on this side of the chamber. Our commitment includes \$121 million for outside school hours care. We are investing \$21.2 million in the NDIS navigators program that is helping families deal with the national disability insurance scheme. We know it is a wonderful scheme – a wonderful legacy of former Prime Minister Gillard, and I know the federal member for Maribyrnong and government services minister Bill Shorten is also working hard on it. We know that often families find it incredibly hard to navigate, and that is why we are rolling out at our specialist schools the navigators program to support those families. I had the great pleasure very early in my tenure as the Minister for Education to be out at the school of the deaf to make that announcement about the navigators program in our disability schools.

But we are also making sure we do other things. We know the importance of therapy pools. The evidence is in about how a therapy pool can also support so many children with disabilities in school hours, so rolling out a \$25 million investment for specialist schools to apply and install therapy pools is really, really important. We are very proud of that. I want to say nothing gives more pleasure than being out and seeing what we are doing, whether it is in Craigieburn at the Wayi School or whether recently at the Victorian College for the Deaf, our disability schools and our disability sector are outstanding. Any conversation about opportunity must include people of all abilities and all backgrounds. I know as Minister for Education and as a former employment minister, one of my favourite ABC programs is *Employable Me*. We know it starts with education. We know that for people with neurodiverse backgrounds, whether it is in banking or whether it is in public transport, there is a role and an avenue for them to be very much encouraged as strong participants in our economic and social workforce. We are very proud of that on this side of the chamber, and to have the member for Eltham here, who I know is so passionate about this in her portfolios, is excellent.

I mentioned previously the breakfast clubs, the music in schools program and a lot of other programs that we are so very proud of. I am often asked, 'What are you going to do as education minister to build on your predecessor's work, Ben?' I say, 'I want to be on the side of teachers.' There can be no more important role than that of our teaching workforce, and Jason Clare himself said this to me recently. What we are doing in Victoria means we have more people applying to be teachers here than anywhere else. I was at an ASEAN dinner last night with the Premier, and they were talking about the Education State. They noticed it on our numberplates. They know we put our money where our mouth

is, and we invest in it. We are getting on with the job of making sure we have the strongest workforce. That is why we are seeing that school vacancies are a lot lower compared to last year. It is why we are seeing more than 50,000 teachers that work across our government schools doing an outstanding job. But it is no accident. The Allan Labor government has invested more than \$1.6 billion in workforce initiatives. It is about getting on and supporting them.

The member for Mulgrave and I were out with the Premier recently to discuss some of those initiatives to support more people through the different programs with the paid placements. Whether it is for the disability sector or whether it is for rural and regional Victoria, some of those hard-to-reach places for schoolteachers, we are putting money on the table – to help them with rent, to help with the cost-of-living issues and to incentivise them to go to those schools. And it is working. It is paying dividends. This is stuff that is not happening anywhere else in Australia. We have got the teaching scholarships. As I said before, they have led to an almost 10 per cent increase in people becoming teachers. I was with Chancellor John Brumby at La Trobe University at the science of language and reading lab last week. They are getting more and more people wanting to go in and become teachers, because they know if you want to make a difference on disadvantage, if you want to shift the dial on anyone's life, it begins with education. We have got the teaching scholarships. We have got the Teach Today and Teach Tomorrow programs, providing 1200 funded accelerated employment-based teaching degrees. We have got the paid placements. We could not be more proud of what we are doing. We have got the Career Start program to support students.

Finally, I just want to say often the narrative can be quite negative. You only have to pick up the newspapers or get online and often the narrative can be negative. But having been at the Education State Forum with 100 leaders last week, we should be so positive about education in this state. We sometimes think in election cycles, but having been in office for over nine years, we are only really just hitting our stride now with what the Productivity Commission handed down recently – on growing our teacher workforce, student-to-teacher ratios and making sure we continue to invest in Indigenous students. Their attendance rates are the best they have been right here in Victoria and are leading the nation. We have got a lot more to do, though, and we want to make sure that we continue to work right across our sector to ensure the public narrative and the perception is very much in line with what it is today – growing our teaching workforce, building more schools than anywhere else and with Victorian kids at the top of the class, according to NAPLAN. And the wonderful thing is, in the minute I have got left, we have got so much more to do – 100 new schools by 2026.

Many people in this chamber have spoken on the recent legislation concerning the 50 government-owned childcare centres, and we know the importance of the first 1000, 2000 days of a child's life. The Best Start, Best Life initiative – a game changer with free four- and three-year-old kinder – is really setting everyone up for life. From preschool to primary and secondary school and then whether it is university or a vocational education, in the Education State there is every opportunity for every individual to fulfil their dreams, go on and have a wonderful education and then embed in their employment lifelong education so they continue to go back to uni, do micro-credentialing or go back to TAFE. We are known as the government that restored TAFE; that came up at a dinner last night with ASEAN leaders. We are known as the government that puts education front and centre, and it is why we are the Education State – and we are not done yet.

**Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:16):** I am delighted to rise to speak on the matter of public importance today submitted by the Minister for Education the member for Niddrie:

That this house notes that Victoria is the Education State, with the Allan Labor government implementing a range of policies to ensure all students get the best start in life.

From the outset, we on this side of the house cannot be clearer that we do not think that this could be further from the truth. It is a true misnomer to call Victoria the Education State. From the outset can I say I agree with the education minister's points around the importance of providing quality education for all Victorian children. Making sure that all Victorian children have the very best start to life is

critical to the work we do in this place and the investments we make in education right across the board.

Every opportunity needs to be given to students to achieve their full potential, and I think the minister's characterisation in particular around the work we do right across Victoria in special schools is a great example of where we do have a lot of bipartisan support. I have had the opportunity to visit many of these schools – Emerson School in the outer areas of Melbourne, Belmore School in my own electorate – to see the amazing work that educators and teachers do in these schools to make sure students can reach their own full potential and have access to inclusive education. There have been debates recently, particularly at the federal level, around the future of specialised education – suggestions that over time it should be phased out – and I think if you speak to any parent or family that chooses to send their child to a special school, they will tell you the benefits of that education. We on this side and, I think it is fair to say, those on the opposite side agree wholeheartedly on the opportunities that specialised education can provide for students right across the board, and we want to make sure we can continue to provide those into the future.

But on the topic today of the Education State, there are a number of points that we on this side of the house would like to point to that suggest that this slogan the government likes to put out there – as the minister said, to be seen on licence plates across Victoria – is meaningless to Victorian students, teachers and families that are experiencing every single day the dire state of Victoria's education system. I will start with the state of our schools and the many government schools that I hear about on a daily basis that are falling into disrepair because the Labor government is intent on a policy of go slow when it comes to particularly urgent maintenance requests from schools.

Just last week we saw children at Balnarring Primary School locked out of their classrooms because of the presence of toxic mould – a situation that continues to unfold. The school reported this immediately to the Victorian School Building Authority, and like for other schools that have experienced situations when it comes to mould and urgent maintenance requests, the VSBA simply did not act. Parents were rightly overwhelmed by the situation because when you send your kids to school you would think that you are sending them to a safe and hygienic environment, but unfortunately in this case that simply was not the case. I quote from a parent, Jess, from the school:

This is a huge displacement and disruption to their learning, especially students in year five that have NAPLAN coming up, they've got none of their resources including laptops and pencil cases as they were left in the building ...

Other mothers have also expressed concerns about their child's health, some students have had asthma and other issues.

We are really disappointed with the lack of action from the government and we feel like as parents that our calls are not being answered.

This is an unacceptable situation, but sadly it is far from unique when it comes to the Allan government's so-called Education State. We can look at Northcote High, who have shared their concern about structural cracking in their hall. A floor collapsed in a classroom at Fitzroy North Primary School last year, and more than a year later the plastic remains covering the entrance to that room, with access still not possible for students. Students are confined to learning in the school's hall. I have spoken before – and I do not think the member for Tarneit is here – about Tarneit P-9, which in its own principal's words is a 'portable city', not keeping up with the pace of demand and not putting in place permanent learning facilities.

In my own electorate, at Canterbury Girls Secondary College a wall literally collapsed during school hours. Luckily, no-one was hurt – everyone was in class at the time – but for years upon years Canterbury Girls has been calling out for urgent funding and has not received funding in decades. To have a wall collapse at this school was simply shocking for the students and teachers who were there at the time. In Sandringham there has not been any heating in the junior campus for two years, there are not enough toilets for teachers and the corridors still flood despite roof repairs. There is a similar

story in my own electorate at Balwyn Primary School, where there are simply not enough toilets for students. The school council president at Camberwell Primary has said four classrooms have been closed for two years because they are just deplorable. I know in the member for Euroa's electorate at Broadford Secondary classes are being held in corridors because classrooms are simply not in a state to be used, with a locker room closed due to asbestos. And at Mildura West Primary School, after two master plans – years upon years of master plans being developed – the school is still being held together by plywood.

I could go on and on, but government schools throughout Victoria are being forced to shut classrooms and cordon off buildings, and as the record debt in this state continues to grow, we can see it is really starting to bite due to the ageing infrastructure causing hazards for students and the maintenance not being kept up with. And we know the response from the government is literally to cover their ears and pretend this is not happening. We have heard that from the minister today. They do not want to hear it and they are not interested in actually fixing it, but we need to make sure that every single student and every single teacher in every single government school across this state has a safe and hygienic environment to learn in. This is the most basic of standards that we are failing to provide our students and teachers, and the Allan government needs to step up and provide this urgent maintenance as soon as possible.

I turn now to the teacher crisis, and we have heard just today from the minister during question time about the government's plans to deal with the workforce challenges in this space. But the reality is schools simply cannot find the teachers that they need. This is a story I hear every single time I visit a school. Every single school I visit talk about the fact that, touch wood, they have got enough teachers to last them until the end of term 1, and then they will deal with what happens after that and try to find the next round of teachers. As of today there are 1466 teaching vacancies across Victoria.

Some regional schools received less than one application for every teacher job that they advertised last year. Labor's teacher shortage crisis was years in the making, and the reality is it is compromising our learning outcomes and the quality education that students deserve. We know now that there are examples of VCE classes being cancelled across the state for unknown periods of time and students being told to do private study because their VCE classes do not have a teacher to teach them. This is going to impact on their ability to get the score they need to go to university – and it has a further effect as well. Last week I was visiting the member for South-West Coast's electorate visiting schools across Portland and Warrnambool, and what was very clear from those discussions with principals in regional areas was the fact that these schools cannot find teachers to fill particularly STEM classes but VCE classes in science and maths. We know that these students require these classes and these VCE subjects to be able to access courses in university. In many cases they are prerequisites for certain courses. And these schools, while they would have demand to run them, simply cannot find teachers to do so.

What the teacher crisis is doing is putting greater burden on the existing teacher workforce. As one school principal said to me, 'We don't have a teacher shortage, we have a teacher exodus, because people in the profession are working in conditions that are so appalling that they are choosing to leave the profession.' We heard from the minister just before that the government is investing in initiatives – in fact that hundreds of millions of dollars are being put into these initiatives to attract teachers to the regions in particular – but when you talk to these school principals, they will be the first to tell you that it is simply not working. It is not having the effect, and a consequence of that is looking at how this taxpayer money is being wasted on programs that are not doing anything to improve our teaching workforce.

The other issue here is around the refusal of this government to release the latest teacher supply and demand report. Just today I got a response from the minister about this report saying that it cannot be released because the time line does not line up. But we know that the last report released, the 2021 report, was in fact ready for release before the election in 2022. Of course it was not released at that time, but it was due to be released in October 2022. We are waiting now on the release of the 2022 report. The teacher supply and demand report is incredibly important for solving our teacher shortage

crisis because it provides the deep analysis and the projections for the next five years. It looks at the workforce challenges and looks at potential solutions. But this government refuse to release the updated report, that 2022 report – we are coming up to the time now for the 2023 report to be released – because they know the true state is something they do not want to reveal to Victorians.

The key other issue I want to raise today is the declining learning outcomes right across the board from Victorian schools. The government and the minister like to talk about the fact that there are record results; they are incredibly proud of the NAPLAN results. But if you look at NAPLAN for 2023, it shows that nearly one-third of Victorian students are failing to meet proficiency standards around literacy and numeracy. One-third of Victorian students are failing to meet those standards. I am not sure how we can be proud of results when we have got a third of Victorian students failing to meet the foundational skills required as part of their education. If you look to the international results, the Programme for International Student Assessment 2022 results show that half of Victorian students are now not achieving a proficient standard in mathematics. Mathematics is a skill, as we know, that will be increasingly important as we look to the jobs of the future. But concerningly the results of PISA also show disproportionately poor results from Victoria's most disadvantaged students, with 45 per cent of Victorian students from disadvantaged backgrounds being low performers in mathematics.

Just two weeks ago I joined with the Minister for Education at the launch of the Melbourne Catholic Archdiocese Schools' new approach to teaching and learning, which explicitly embraces direct instruction and evidence-based teaching across learning methods and of course phonics. On this side of the house we have been prepared and ready to embrace phonics for years, but we have a government, a Labor government, that has a phonics phobia and has even blocked the release of the taxpayer-funded report conducted by La Trobe University that demonstrated positive results from the introduction of phonics in a number of government primary schools. These were positive results that lifted learning outcomes, but the government is refusing to release that report.

Just a couple of weeks ago the Grattan Institute released a report highlighting the importance of adopting evidence-based learning, and as part of this report they demonstrated how the Allan government is lagging behind other jurisdictions, particularly how it 'muddies the water' of different approaches when it comes to teaching methods. This choose-your-own-adventure approach by the government is resulting in nearly one-third of Victorian students not being able to read.

Whether it is the state of our schools, the maintenance of our schools, the teacher shortage crisis that is crippling our education system and seeing learning outcomes decline or the lack of will from this government when it comes to introducing evidence-based learning, the Education State could not be further from the truth in this state.

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (16:31): It is with some pleasure this afternoon that I rise to make my contribution on all of the investments that the Allan Labor government is making with respect to Victoria's education system, and I must say, in my time in this place listening to the contributions of Labor members, I could not be prouder of what Labor does when it is given that great opportunity to be in government in the state of Victoria.

It is simply not good enough to say one thing when you are in opposition and to do something completely different when you are in government. With Labor, our approach has always been: no matter where you live in the state of Victoria, whether you live in our great regions, in our rural communities, in the outer suburbs, in the middle suburbs or in our fantastic regional cities, every single Victorian deserves the best possible education, and the reason why we believe that is because every single child in Victoria deserves the very, very best. We want to make sure that every single Victorian from cradle to grave gets the greatest opportunity that they can to have a rich and fulfilled life, and the absolute fundamental tenet for that to happen is to have access to a quality education. That is why we are making those investments in our kinders right across our state. That is why we are introducing free kinder. That is why we are introducing three-year-old kinder, because fundamentally that investment up-front, early in a child's development, is so critical for their future.

It is also why we are making a massive investment in our growth corridors across Melbourne and regional Victoria. That is why we have set an ambitious target of opening 100 new schools, and I was very pleased to see our active Minister for Education out and about opening 14 new schools this year alone, building on Labor's record of achievement with respect to these new schools that we are building. We are doing that because every single Victorian deserves access to a quality government school. That is why we are making these investments in our regional growth corridors, and we will continue to strive and continue to make those investments to make sure Victoria's public schools are fantastic. But also we recognise that with the ambition that we have in this state to grow our economy and to create jobs, we need to make sure that Victorians have the right set of skills available to be able to participate in Labor's Big Build. That is why we reversed those insidious cuts made by the Liberals when they were last in government with respect to our fantastic TAFEs.

I am someone who is so pleased with the investments we have made in our TAFE system, where we have had to reopen TAFEs closed by the Liberals when they were last in government. That is why we have got free TAFE training, to make sure we are providing the skills that young people need for the jobs our economy needs. We recognise the importance of that because we want to see every single Victorian with the skills our economy needs, and we will continue to build on these programs as our state continues to grow and develop. We also recognise, no matter where you work as a teacher – whether it be in a kinder setting, whether it be in a school setting or a TAFE setting – the importance of those men and women working in that space as teachers, and that is why we are investing to make sure we have got the very best teachers available for people across Victoria, and we will continue to make those investments to recruit, to train and to have the very best teachers that we can. Education is a great enabler. It is so important from our perspective that we make these great investments.

When we reflect of course on our record of achievement, the things that we do when we are given that great opportunity to be in government, we need to look at what the coalition do when they are given the opportunity of being in government. It does not matter what decade you look at, whether it be the 1990s or whether it be that period between 2010 and 2014, at every opportunity, when the coalition are given that great gift of government, they go after our public education institutions – they close our schools and they go after teachers. That is what they do when they are given that great opportunity to be in government. We will always make investments into our public schools, into our kinders and into our TAFE programs because we recognise and value them. Whenever we see the coalition in government, they go after our public education institutions to favour those elitist private schools often found in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. We will continue to make these investments. We will continue to make sure every single Victorian, no matter where they live, gets the opportunity to access a great education – a great public education – with great schools, great teachers and supportive communities. We want to make sure that we give every single Victorian from three years of age right through to completing TAFE or going on to university every single opportunity that we can.

When I was thinking about it in the lead-up to the 2022 election I thought, 'Jeez, we've done a lot.' We have made a lot of investments, we are building a lot of schools, we are doing some fantastic work in the TAFE space, we are doing some fantastic work in the kinder space and we are providing every single Victorian more opportunities. I thought to myself, 'What more could we do?' What possible things could we come up with to continue to build on our record of achievement? I knew what I was going to campaign for in my local community, but I very much thought what more could we do. What I was very pleased to see is that we recognised in some parts of Victoria a childcare drought where some people, because of the community that they live in, are not being provided that opportunity. Very pleasingly and very surprisingly to me we made that investment. We made the announcement that we were going to end the childcare drought in those areas by making an investment, and that is what we are doing.

We are making those investments. We are stepping into a space that historically governments across Australia have not made that investment in. We are pushing the boundaries, and the reason why we

are pushing those boundaries is because every single Victorian deserves the very, very best opportunities.

In my seat, the seat of South Barwon, Geelong's growth corridor, I can see in school after school record investment where we are building quality buildings, we are building quality schools and we are making those investments to ensure that every child in my electorate and every child across the state of Victoria gets the very, very best access to a quality education. I could not be prouder of the investments Labor make when we are in government, and it is in stark contrast to what the coalition do every single time that they are given that great gift of government, which is chaos, cuts, closures – it is taking the back of a meat axe to our very proud schools.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (16:41): I am pleased to rise today and speak on this matter of public importance submitted by the member for Niddrie, which boasts about the work the Allan Labor government is doing in the education sector. It is lovely to follow the latest contribution about pushing boundaries, because I think I will give you an explanation of the boundaries that this government is really pushing. While it is not an attempt to be self-indulgent, this MPI is an attempt to pat the government on the back. But I must give Labor a healthy dose of reality.

Within my electorate is Kilmore, the largest town in Victoria without a public secondary school, located in one of the biggest growth corridors in the state. The only secondary school option currently in Kilmore is Assumption College, a private school that has fees starting from nearly \$9000 a year. Assumption is an outstanding school, because it did produce one of my fabulous staff members and digital wizards; however, not everyone in Kilmore has the opportunity to attend private school. Down the road in Broadford and Wallan the schools are already at or very nearing capacity, and students as young as 12 years old are having to make a 2-hour commute to and from school each day. The need for a school in Kilmore has been repeatedly brought to this government's attention, yet it has been ignored every time.

There was a golden opportunity just missed due to a lack of urgency and care from this government and from the former Minister for Education. Despite thousands of local residents signing petitions calling for the state government to purchase the former Colmont School campus, it was instead sold privately. The previous Minister for Education was made aware of this opportunity on multiple occasions and was invited to meet with local families to hear how desperately they needed this school. Instead she did nothing, demonstrating a short-sightedness and arrogance that has resulted in hundreds of families being left without reasonable local education options. This former school campus was ready-made and conveniently on the market, and it had the opportunity to provide a cost-effective solution to this very real problem for our community. So I ask: why should these children be placed at such a disadvantage just because of where they live? This is not some rural, remote location; this is Kilmore, one of the fastest growing towns in our state. It is time to listen to the community and provide them with a public school.

I have some direct quotes from Kilmore residents who have signed the petition. There are nearly 3500 signatures, so I think I will just give you a couple of those comments. Rachel Fairman said:

... family's and children should not have to suffer exhaustion to gain an education ...

Jamie Leahy said:

I have 3 kids who will all need a high school to go to soon. I shouldn't have to bus them out of town so they can get the education they deserve!

Meghan Thorpe said:

I have 2 children that will be attending high school in the next few years my husband and I can't afford a private school and don't want to travel really far away ...

Margaret Kelly said:

There is an empty school, you don't have a school, yet somehow the government is not joining the dots!

Tracey Challis said:

The amount of housing getting built in the area, the growth of the township and surrounding areas, there is definitely enough families to warrant a public highschool ... A town this size and only offering a private school is just wrong. There has been talks and petitions –

but –

... This has been needed for several years ... It's about time the government listened.

Rebecca Hocking said:

We need more options for public high schools in the area, having a public high school option for Kilmore will relieve commuting stress factors and make schools more accessible.

Families in Kilmore should not be forced into paying for a private school as their only option within town or having to commute to a completely different town just so their child can receive an education. I think everyone in this chamber can agree that everyone deserves an education close to home. These are just a handful of the thousands of responses received, nearly 3500 signatures, all of which agree that this Labor government has let them down when it comes to finding reasonable education for their children. We could fill a school tomorrow in Kilmore, yet I have got nothing but crickets out of this government, who is bold enough to brag about its education investments. How can this government pat themselves on the back about their contributions to education while this goes on?

Unfortunately, Kilmore is not the only part of my electorate desperately campaigning for a public school. I want to thank Shayne Swansborough for his recent work pushing for a public secondary school in Heathcote, another community with a significant population to warrant a secondary school. With two primary schools in the town, Heathcote sees seven busloads of secondary school children depart every morning for trips between 45 minutes to 1 hour each way. Most children on these buses are now required to leave home by 7:30 am and will not get home until nearly 5 pm. With a secondary school in Heathcote, the children would save 2 hours a day in travel. On top of this, we have issues at schools in Tooborac, issues electorate-wide with students unable to access free school bus routes, road safety issues at Colbinabbin Primary School and concerns over school crossing supervisors in both the Strathbogie shire and in Heathcote.

Funding debates continue between our local councils and the state government over who will adequately fund the school crossing supervisor program, leaving our children incredibly vulnerable in the meantime. The program was previously fully funded through the department of transport, with the percentage contribution from the Victorian government rapidly declining in recent years and cost shifting to local councils. This is a matter of utmost importance to our local community that has to be resolved and is genuinely putting children's lives on the line until it is resolved. Conversations I have had with community members have made it clear that this is something worth fighting for, and I stand with them. We will not stop fighting until our children are safe. Calls for the supervisors to be reinstated have hit fever pitch following a near miss of a collision by a speeding vehicle at a school crossing. Despite Nagambie Primary School principal Rob French wearing a hi-vis vest and holding a stop sign, this speeding car nearly hit him. If it had been a child crossing the road unsupervised, then there is no doubt this could have been a horrific ending. It is concerning that there has been a lack of urgency in ensuring the safety of our children at school crossings by this government.

Another point I must raise is the state of child care in Victoria, particularly in regional Victoria. As things currently stand, regional Victoria is in dire need of more childcare centres, because you are right: we are riddled with childcare deserts. Kilmore, Broadford, the Benalla region and the Seymour region are all classified as childcare deserts by the Mitchell Institute. Waitlists in many towns in my electorate are now up to two years long. In Seymour we have an eight-baby capacity in a childcare centre and an 80-strong waitlist. We have got incredible local childcare providers, but in most of these places there are up to six kids competing for one place. It is not sustainable. These are major towns, but they are being placed at a disadvantage when child care is so rare. The lack of childcare options is

placing a significant barrier on young people who want to raise their family in regional Victoria. Towns like Nagambie and Avenel were not included in the new childcare facility announcement, despite serious problems finding local childcare in these areas.

While we have seen the announcement of 50 new childcare early learning centres that will be established across the state, the issues persist with the rollout. As part of the government's plan for new early learning centres I was pleased that Seymour, located in my electorate, was included to alleviate some of the strain on the system locally. But our community is now angry about this misleading announcement. The reality is that it will not be delivered until beyond 2028, if it is delivered at all, and it is an absolute slap in the face to parents not wanting but needing to return to work.

This headline-grabbing announcement has prevented private providers and not-for-profits from filling the childcare void, yet this government has no goal to actually deliver and relieve childcare centres. The Allan Labor government is simply not prepared to fix the childcare crisis, and in many cases it could be argued that it is compounding the crisis with the slow rollout of centres. We are already seeing a scramble by this government to find ways to deliver yet another program they have announced without a suitable or thought-out plan.

In 2023 the Australian Childcare Alliance surveyed over 600 childcare centres, with over two-thirds responding by saying they had capped enrolments due to staffing shortages. As a result 16,000 childcare places lay dormant due to the workforce crisis. Disruptions and distortions to the market could result in a significant reduction in the number of childcare places. The government estimates it would need 700 educators and 100 teachers and support staff. The hundreds of staff will need to be ready to go in these centres from day one. Simply put, this government has not earned the right to boast about its contributions to education.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (16:51): I am delighted to rise to speak on this matter of public importance, though I do wonder if those on the other side live in a different reality. Everyone that I speak to and know absolutely acknowledges the extraordinary work that this government has done in education. It is not just a number plate, it is something people say: Victoria is the Education State, showing in our NAPLAN and showing in our young people. It is an extraordinary accomplishment. The great Gough Whitlam of course said:

We are all diminished when any of us are denied proper education. The nation is the poorer – a poorer economy, a poorer national civilisation, because of this national human waste.

The wonderful Gough Whitlam knew then that we need to bring everybody along with us. I have been delighted to listen to extraordinary contributions from our wonderful Deputy Premier and of course my friend and colleague the member for South Barwon about the many things that we have done.

But there is a particularly personal piece for me, which is around what this government has done for TAFE. As many people in this room know, I am a TAFE alumna. It literally changed my life. I was trying to find a new career. I was not confident enough to go off to university, so I started a TAFE degree and it created a pathway. I went through and did my diploma, then I did my BA and then I did a master of politics, and here I am today. So TAFE is really close to my heart, and it is something that this government has done an extraordinary job on. Sadly, when I started my TAFE course it was under the previous Liberal government, and it was a pretty awful time for anyone who was engaged with TAFE.

**A member** interjected.

**Michaela SETTLE**: Really dark days. They absolutely gutted the TAFE system. They took over a billion dollars out of TAFE. They shut 22 TAFE campuses, padlocking Lilydale, shutting down Greensborough. They should be ashamed, because TAFE is for everybody, and this government has always looked to help everyone in the community. We have a minister in the other place, the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and I have never met a more passionate minister. She has been in that role since

2016, and I think she has quite literally transformed TAFE. It has been extraordinary. I can remember the minister saying to me very early on that she was adamant that vocational education was the equal of higher education and she would not stop until people realised that reality, and we have got there.

But of course what is extraordinary about both that minister and this government is that they did not stop there. Not only did we go to rebuild TAFE, but we then looked at free TAFE. Free TAFE is an extraordinary service that we have done for people in our community. This week marks five years, so a big happy birthday to free TAFE. It has made some really, really fundamental changes in our system. In Ballarat we have the Fed Uni TAFE of course, and I was just talking to the provost of the TAFE – he is the director of the TAFE and the provost of the uni. And in 2024 they now have record enrolments. They have never had enrolments as high as this. Some of that has been generated of course more recently by free TAFE but also just by the fact that this government and this minister have put so much effort into rebuilding TAFE. In Ballarat between 2019 and 2023 we had 4171 enrolments. That is a pretty extraordinary number of people that have now been able to go out and get a TAFE education.

But of course these are just numbers, and I think it is really important to remember that behind these numbers are people – very real people. Now, I was delighted to visit the Ballarat Base Hospital with my colleagues from Ripon and Wendouree and the wonderful Minister for Health a week ago. It was really interesting because we rode the lift up to the top of the building site and there was a wonderful young woman called Sam. She was the site manager, and she had done a free TAFE course to get there, to become that site manager. We get to the top and we meet another young woman. Well, she was on her second day of work. She had previously worked in hospitality. She was in her early 30s and decided that she wanted to do something more, and she enrolled in a free TAFE course. She is now an enrolled nurse. So it is not just the numbers; you are surrounded by people that have had their lives changed. And you might notice something in those two examples: they were both women. That is what free TAFE for me has really changed, because it has been women that have been able to pick it up. It has really made a difference to women who wanted to re-enter the workforce. That is why I went to TAFE. Thankfully, I was okay with it, but a lot of women have to make that choice – do I retrain, can I afford to retrain, or do I need to just stay at home and look after the kids because I cannot afford to retrain? What free TAFE has meant is that so many people have now been able to go on and further their career.

Just last Friday I was at the Fed Uni TAFE excellence awards, and there were 250 graduating students. Now, they were not all from free TAFE, but they were certainly alumni of this extraordinary system that this government has rebuilt – this system that those on the other side did not think was worth funding. They had no respect. They have never had respect for working people, and they have never understood that we need to support people in trades and that vocational training is absolutely the equal of higher education.

When I was speaking to the provost recently, he said that the impacts of free TAFE have really been very broad and that what he loves about this program is that it is regionally assessed and also nimble. He described a situation where they had been advocating to the government about adding a free TAFE course, and indeed that has now happened. This government listened, and there is now a cert III in training and assessment. And he told me that that is one of the highest enrolments that they have. Of course what that means is that there will be more free TAFE teachers. The other thing that he pointed out was just the sort of general wellbeing and mental health of their students since free TAFE came along. You know, a lot of people have to sit there and wonder in the time of a cost-of-living crisis whether they can afford to continue their education, and of course free TAFE means that they absolutely can.

Since 2014 this government has absolutely rebuilt TAFE, and free TAFE has been an extraordinary success. More than 156,000 students in Victoria have gone through free TAFE, saving them \$432 million in fees. It has changed lives for people. It has changed workforces for people. And as I

say, a goodly proportion of the 156,000 – 87,000 of them – were women who could go and retrain and re-enter the workforce. It has been an extraordinary success.

I would like to acknowledge again the minister in the other place. I have known her for many years. She has been in the portfolio since 2016, and she has not wasted a day. She rebuilt TAFE and then just kept going, introducing free TAFE. It has been such a life changer for so many people, and I include in that myself. I retrained, I found the confidence and I went back into the workforce after having been at home as a stay-at-home mum. The Deputy Premier did steal my other quote, which is of course: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' That was the wonderful Nelson Mandela. This government is all about changing the world for the better. We know the importance of education. We have invested in education, and lifelong learning has been so utterly important. Those on the other side have never respected TAFE. They utterly, utterly gutted it in their last iteration, and it was a shame, and we have worked long and hard to build it. People like the provost at Fed Uni will tell you that now they have record enrolments, because this government respects TAFE.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (17:01): I rise to speak on the matter of public importance, which goes to the heart of the question of whether Victoria is the Education State. Let me start by putting on the record that education is an issue that is close to my heart. As I did share in my maiden speech, I come from a family history where my maternal grandmother is – to this day at 90 years old – still illiterate because of the poverty that she grew up in. In two generations we have been able to come from this place of poverty and illiteracy in my family to me being the member for Warrandyte here in Melbourne. That is a wonderful thing. I do know – it is a lived experience of my family – that education breaks the poverty cycle. I want to put that on record.

I want to put on record as well that it is an issue close to my heart because I am the first in my family to graduate from university. As a consequence of the sacrifices of my grandmother and of my parents, that was something that I was able to achieve for our family, and that is something that I think is fantastic. To that point I would also like to shout out to all our brilliant educators. We love teachers here on this side of the house. We truly do. My mum, who came from an illiterate mother herself, was able to become a teacher in Malaysia when she graduated from teachers college in Malacca, Malaysia. That is my mum. My sister-in-law as well is a brilliant teacher in the member for Euroa's patch. She is just brilliant. So I wanted to put that on record, as well as to say that we have wonderful and amazing schools in my electorate.

One of my favourite parts of the job is to actually get out to these schools and spend time with students, spend time with these educators and spend time in school communities, but if we are to be the Education State we must ensure that our schools have the best facilities and opportunities so that our students can succeed. I would like to put some questions to the minister on the record, and I will detail them one by one in the time that I have.

At Andersons Creek Primary School there is a new principal, Daniel Webber. He has been doing a fantastic job. I saw him just recently, on Sunday morning, at Run Warrandyte. He was involved in it himself personally as well as getting students from the school involved. It is a great community initiative fundraising for our local sports clubs. What I would like to know about Andersons Creek Primary School, what I would like to ask the minister, is whether there are plans to upgrade the old Andersons Creek Primary School playground, which is in dire need of financial assistance.

Then we have got a school in my electorate, Ringwood North Primary School, with principal Ken Chatterton. Just last year they celebrated their 100-year anniversary. I was privileged to be there with them on that day. That weekend they also had their school fair. Ringwood North Primary School's current 200-seat stadium is too small for a school of 432 students. They simply do not fit, so I ask the minister whether there are plans to upgrade this stadium.

Then there is Chirnside Park Primary School in my electorate – it was formerly in the member for Evelyn’s until there was a state redistribution. I was there at a leadership assembly a few weeks ago. The principal Graham Elliott – again, a fantastic school principal – articulated to me that there is no indoor gym space and school assemblies have to be held outside. I ask the minister: when will you address this issue? I also ask the minister: given that there was funding given to the school in 2020 to upgrade the school oval, why is it that four years later there still has not been an upgrade to the oval?

Finally, we have Donburn Primary School, another fantastic school in my electorate, with an excellent leadership team at the helm of principal Julie Hoskin and assistant principals Jarod Ryan, Jess Bullen and Sue Fuller. I had a wonderful time visiting there last week going from class to class. Chinese is their language at this school in Donvale, and I was privileged to pay a visit to one of the Chinese classes. I got to indulge in some of my conversational Mandarin, and it was fantastic – great to be able to do. In 2017 they had a master plan come through, and they are still waiting for the next stage of building classrooms. Their portable classrooms have significant issues and the cost to upkeep them is skyrocketing. I ask the minister: when will the government be taking the next step in building these new classrooms? This is just to name a few schools in my electorate that I have visited in my first six months as the new member for Warrandyte. I will continue to be a vocal advocate for our local schools and for our community.

Now to the question at hand: the Allan Labor government calling Victoria the Education State. I wonder how that can be when there are situations and stories that we hear of like toxic mould in primary schools that is making our primary school students sick – primary school students at a state school. At Balnarring Primary School, in the electorate of the member for Hastings, who has actually left the chamber now, there are primary students who have been exposed to toxic mould, with parents expressing concerns about their children’s health and disruptions to learning. How can we call ourselves the Education State when the parents are saying that their kids have respiratory illnesses, including asthma, and a series of other health issues amid this serious mould problem?

This is an issue that is close to my heart because we have also had similar problems at Heatherwood School in my electorate. Heatherwood School is in Donvale, in my electorate, and it is an amazing school which endeavours to give young people with learning disabilities the same educational opportunities as anyone else. On the day of my by-election there was a fire that occurred at the school, and that only served to exacerbate the fact that the builder had fallen through in May 2023. Then in August the *Herald Sun* reported that Heatherwood School was enveloped in black poisonous mould. We have a disability school in my electorate that is in enveloped in poisonous black mould – and we call ourselves the Education State. I had the parents writing to me from this school, and this is what they said to me:

The apparent lack of effort in pushing the Victorian School Building Authority to secure a builder for Heatherwood School not only raises serious concerns but also gives us the impression of discrimination against a vulnerable community.

That is a quote directly from a parent.

It is disheartening that our repeated attempts to communicate our urgent needs and concerns have gone unanswered, leaving us feeling unheard and marginalised. The delay in putting our building works to tender until September has left our community questioning why our children, who are equally deserving of quality education facilities, seem to be treated differently. We believe that every child’s potential deserves equal attention and support. The delay in addressing our situation only deepens the sense of discrimination.

This is from one of the parents of this school, so how can we call ourselves the Education State? Another parent at this school wrote to me describing how her 16-year-old son was in fear of using the toilets. She says:

They are located far from the classroom, and if he goes during class time there’s no teacher available to supervise. He’s been locked in the portable toilets on several occasions by bullies. The trauma of the noises, the smells, is too much for him. My other son holds on, and when he comes home he is busting to use the toilet. He sits on a bus for 90 minutes on the way home from school.

Another parent wrote to me that it was such a scary place for her son to actually go to the toilets that sometimes he would come home – and I remind you again this is a school that supports students with a disability – with soiled clothing because he could not use this toilet that the Allan Labor government failed to actually renovate despite it being in this dire state.

I ask how the Allan Labor government can claim to be the Education State when the statistics are so shocking: a Grattan Institute report recently said that around one in four Victorian school students are not proficient at reading. In my professional life as a youth worker I saw this firsthand – that there were vulnerable young people who could not read or write, who had been failed by our education system, who ended up disengaging with school, falling into youth gangs and, sadly, being incarcerated and falling into a life of criminality. We need to do better for these students; we need to do better for our young people.

Finally, I know that the Minister for Education did note this, but I would like to set the record straight that under Labor teacher shortages have actually exploded. There are nearly 800 teaching and classroom support roles currently vacant across the state, and Labor's teacher shortage crisis will continue to deny students the high-quality education they deserve, with nine in 10 government school principals declaring teacher shortages. I do not know how we can call ourselves the Education State. So finally, the case is clear: the spin, it is unashamed. I have laid it out so plainly: firstly, toxic mould making kids sick in our schools; secondly, toilets in such dire need of repair that students with a disability avoid the toilets and go home with soiled pants; thirdly, one in four students in Victoria cannot read; and fourthly, teacher shortages have exploded. Do not believe the spin – this is not the Education State.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (17:11): I rise today with great pride in support of this matter of public importance. Ten minutes is simply not long enough for me to talk about and do justice to all of the incredible work that the Allan Labor government has done in ensuring that Victoria is indeed the Education State. I would like to acknowledge, first and foremost, my dear friend the former member for Monbulk and education minister the Honourable James Merlino, who led the charge on a great series of reforms in his time as minister from December 2014 until June 2022, and which the Allan Labor government and our new Minister for Education continue to champion and enhance.

The work our government has undertaken to enhance opportunities – from our littlest learners to adults retraining and upskilling – is exceptional and is absolutely something to be very proud of. I am incredibly excited to also see what will come, because the future looks very bright indeed for learners of all ages and stages of life under our government. As a former teacher, it is not an overstatement to say that I am incredibly passionate about education in all of its forms. From early learning through to post-secondary studies, from the academic and theoretical to the hands-on technical and practical, education is the door through which all things are achievable. Malcolm X stated that it was the 'passport to the future'. It is the great leveller, and good governments who wish to see their people thrive and live decent lives believe in education. They invest in education, and that is precisely what the Allan Labor government has done and continues to do for the state of Victoria. I am an incredibly proud member of this government, which has made it abundantly clear over the past nine years that it is committed to the education of all Victorians, because we know that high-quality education and an abundance of it leads to better outcomes for everyone and our society more broadly.

We have invested significantly in education, and the statistics are quite stark; I will come to them a bit later. But in my electorate alone, two of our major state secondary schools have been practically rebuilt and another is soon to receive a significant upgrade. You would not actually recognise Upwey High School from a satellite image nowadays, with the significant capital works which have occurred over the past few years. It has transformed an old, crumbling school into a state-of-the-art learning facility fit for Victorian students, where they can achieve their very best. The story is the same at Monbulk College. Starting in 2015, the upgrading and modernising of this excellent local school was completed not long ago, and we have completely transformed that one as well. At the end of 2022, stage 1 of a refurbishment of Emerald Secondary College was completed. The new food technology rooms and

textile rooms are something to behold, and the staff and admin building is a place and space fit for great teachers. I am delighted we are actually going to be investing another \$8.77 million to continue the modernisation upgrade of this college, continuing the school's master plan. The architect has been appointed – I was there for that moment, it was wonderful – and the design is underway. I cannot wait to see it.

Thousands of students across this state are learning in more modern classrooms, science labs and libraries and using better facilities at schools like gyms, sports ovals and music rooms. These facilities make a difference because children need places to play, to kick a ball or throw it or to perform a song. They need classrooms which facilitate their learning – the science labs; the food technology rooms; the graphic design, the art and the woodworking rooms; and the list goes on. Teachers can teach under a tree, but to really teach well it helps when the environment is great too.

When it comes to education, we do have an incredible track record to be proud of no matter what others may say. Back in the early 2000s I taught in the state and independent school systems and my actual schooling was across the Catholic system, so I think I have got a fair appreciation for the cross-section of the different schooling systems in our state. Our state schools, back even in the early 2000s, were still in a recovery phase post the shock of having to exist through the Kennett era of the 1990s. That was a time when 350 state schools were closed by that government, and approximately 8000 teachers were sacked. It was a dark time for education in Victoria. Some teachers still recount the trauma of not being paid for months during that era. No money came into their bank accounts from the state government. It was appalling. Fancy that – 350 schools closed. Horrendous. To see where we have arrived at now it is important to look at the context of the past. It gives us an even greater appreciation for the state of education now since Labor governments have come to power and not only repaired the damage of the past but built on and improved our education system to bring it to where it is today. It is absolutely in stark contrast to the dark times of the seven years of the Kennett era. We have invested \$4.9 billion through the Victorian budget in the last budget alone.

**Paul Edbrooke:** How much?

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** \$4.9 billion, member for Frankston. It is a considerable sum in one Victorian budget. As part of that budget the Victorian government allocated just under \$356 million for upgrading and modernising projects at 47 schools across the state. \$272.97 million has been allocated to deliver upgrades at 34 metro schools, and \$82.87 million has been allocated to deliver upgrades at 13 regional schools.

I am very fortunate that in my electorate there are 26 great state schools. We have been upgrading and modernising so many, which I mentioned before, across our term in government. It is the primary schools as well, which I did not touch on before. Monbulk Primary received a \$7 million upgrade and modernisation. It is an old school, which was built in 1887. It looks extraordinary now. It is a great school to go to into the future. And one of our beautiful special development schools, Eastern Ranges School, is also being upgraded along with all the others across the state. I love this school. It is a great school. It was lovely to hear the member for Kew express her appreciation for our special development schools as well. This school is just a particularly great one. Mount Dandenong kinder as well is a great story here. Mount Dandenong kinder was crushed by the trees during the June 2021 storms. The new location for this kindergarten is now on the grounds of the Mount Dandenong Primary School, so that is continuing our policy to ensure that we save the double drop-off wherever we can, so we have this co-located kindergarten. I had the chance to have a walk-through, and I tell you what, it will be exceptional. It is a great story for the community, who had to suffer the loss of their kindergarten through a terrible, terrible circumstance.

Education, as I have stated, absolutely changes lives – from kinder to great local schools all the way through to TAFE. The free TAFE that we have been offering – as the member for Eureka was discussing; I was listening with great interest to her contribution about free TAFE – is not just about ensuring that people can get a form of education because they think it is a nice idea. It is about

upskilling and retraining people, especially as the jobs of the future look quite different to how they looked in the past. We have acknowledged that as a government, and we have ensured that people, no matter what their capacity to pay – it does not matter – have free TAFE courses. It absolutely guarantees that people have greater opportunities. They have a greater capacity to make better choices for themselves going forward and in their careers. That is absolutely to be celebrated.

The other thing that is really close to my heart – and I note I have only got a minute and a half left – is the breakfast club program that we are running. I cannot state more clearly how important it is to ensure that children are not hungry when they are trying to learn, because not many people function terribly well on an empty stomach. Back in my days of teaching in the early 2000s there was no breakfast club but there were plenty of kids who turned up who had had no breakfast and had no lunch, and we really did not know if they were going home to much dinner. Teachers used to put their hands in their pockets and they would go and buy those children some food when they noticed. But that was not terribly sustainable, and it certainly was not on a scale like we produce today.

Our 1000 breakfast clubs ensure that every child who attends one gets to start the day the right way. And it is not just breakfast; they also get lunch packs, and some of them get packs to take home as well. It is an incredible innovation of our government to be doing this, because as I said, hungry people do not learn terribly well, and that just entrenches disadvantage even further. If there is one thing that Labor governments do, it is that we ensure wherever we can that our policies enhance and lift those who need a bit of extra help. It does not matter what your bank balance is; your opportunities should be just the same as anyone else's. I am incredibly proud to be a part of this government, which understands the importance of education and invests in it every day.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (17:21): I am pleased to rise today on the matter of public importance that Victoria is the Education State, and obviously that is debatable. It is debatable, and that is why we are debating it. It has been interesting. I have been sitting in here since the MPI started. I listened to the minister and I have listened to all the contributions, and it is amazing the amount of pork-barrelling that is going on with the Education State. Everything I have heard that has been delivered has been in Labor seats. Even the 50 new centres that the government wants to build – I think 14 are going to be delivered by 2026 and 11 of those, or 80 per cent, are in Labor seats. I remind the government of their catchcry at the last election, which was 'We govern for all Victorians'. I think they are missing a few, probably on this side of the chamber from what I have heard today.

I will start with early education, because we all know it is important. I could not agree more with three- and four-year-old kinder; I think it is very, very important for kids to get educated very early. The problem I have with the government's program, which they announced at the last election which got implemented pretty well straightaway in 2023, is that the government did not give anyone time to get ready for it, and that is a problem we are seeing today. Three-year-old kinder at the moment, in a lot of situations, is being used as child care. And I do not blame the parents. If you would otherwise drop your kid at child care and you can save \$300 a week by taking them to three-year-old kinder, fair enough, because we know the cost of living is out of control and we know life is hard for people under Labor.

But this is what has happened in my electorate because of this government's rush to push this through, and I think the government should have planned this better. I have a centre called Grace Berglund. Grace Berglund was built in 1973, and it was funded – and I know this language might be a little bit off-putting today but it was called this back then – and built by the spastic society for disabled adults. That happened in 1973. It has now been renamed Scope, thank goodness, because the other name was not too flattering. What is happening now is, probably as an unintended consequence of three-year-old kinder with my council trying to keep up with the new government regulation, I have 27 disabled adults getting kicked to the kerb with nowhere to go.

To be honest, there are two parts to the blame here. One, I blame my local council, and the other blame I put on government because they did not give people time. If they had have had time, councils could

have kept up with this, but 27 disabled adults getting kicked to the kerb from a facility they have been in for 50 years is absolutely disgraceful. I am going to take this opportunity now to say to the Baw Baw shire do not put your hand up on this; do not be the councillor that puts your hand up to kick a disabled person to the kerb with nowhere to go. Some of these disabled adults are 35 years old – they have been there a lifetime. It is their comfort zone. So I am saying this on the record: unfortunately, drop three-year-old kinder at this time at this facility because at no point in time should we be kicking disabled people to the kerb with nowhere to go.

But I will go on to learning and what is happening in my electorate. The government claims to be an Education State – that is what they are claiming – but I am not seeing it where I live. I am really not. Last year many in this chamber would have heard me talk about Neerim primary school. We actually tabled a petition last sitting week I believe on Neerim primary school. I did have a meeting with department heads and the chief of staff of the minister as well, and they promised me a meeting for residents of Neerim on the primary school, which is due for closure, but there still has been no meeting. That is disappointing, because I actually took the minister on his word, I took the department on their word, and it has not happened. I have so many schools in my area. I will talk about Drouin Primary School, and I will talk about this school because the government are investing in Drouin Primary School, okay? Great – I appreciate it; we need the investment. The problem is, though, that in the last 50 years the only new government school that has been built in my area is the Warragul specialist school, which I had the pleasure of building myself. And I will say Lynne –

**A member** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** It was a great job, and it was without a doubt one of the most rewarding projects I have ever done. Lynne Kosky was the minister back then, and she was a wonderful lady too, just quietly. I met her, and she was a wonderful lady. But in my electorate in the last 50 years there has been just one new school: Warragul specialist school. The government is investing \$20-odd million in refurbishing Drouin Primary School – and it needs it, no doubt there – but the problem we have got is we need new schools. We do not need a refurbishment. It is not going to add extra students. For more money – there is land that is annexed for a primary school – they could have built a new one. Drouin Primary School is in the centre of town and landlocked, and traffic is horrendous. It takes you 20 minutes to get through Drouin at school time. It is only a kilometre long – 20 minutes. And we need other investment in my area.

Labertouche Primary School has a great principal; she does a fantastic job. She has taken this school from 33 students in three years to 66 students and up to 83 students but cannot get a portable building. If you are going to govern for all Victorians like you said you were going to at the last election, stop pork-barrelling and look to other areas that actually really do need investment, because we are getting very little investment in Narracan. In Labertouche we have got a very, very successful principal doing a great job. We know there are portables out there. We see them on the road to Bendigo, up the Calder Highway; we see them on the road sitting there. Please put a portable in so they have got more room. We love our teachers, but at the moment they have got no staffroom. They have no staffroom because of the lack of investment in these regional schools.

Then I was down this week at Yarragon Primary School, another school I built, by the way; I will just put that in there. I built Yarragon Primary School back in 2011. But that school is nearly at capacity and needs to expand, and it does not look like there is any investment there. Even car parking is an issue.

Then I have got Nilma Primary School: same problem – full, no car parking. So the government is telling me this is the Education State, but I think the government is picking and choosing where it wants to invest, and I do not think that is fair. Victorians took government at their word. The government said, ‘We will govern for all Victorians,’ so I am calling on the government to back that up. I am calling on the government to do what matters and govern for all Victorians in my electorate, because at the moment it is not happening. I was down at Trafalgar last week. That school is near

capacity, with sporting facilities that they cannot play sport on. That local community actually cohabits; the local community uses that school as well. They are in desperate need of upgrades as well.

We have to look beyond city-centric Melbourne, we have to look beyond Labor electorates and we have to look at coalition electorates that are in great need. I have said this in this chamber before: I live in one of the fastest growing areas in Victoria, and I would like the government to start to take notice. I do appreciate that the government is going to build one of their 50 centres in my electorate in 2028, which is a long way away for a region that is experiencing such growth, but as far as the MPI goes, that we are the Education State – well, you are falling very short in my electorate.

**Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:31):** I am delighted to rise today to speak on this matter of public importance that this house notes that Victoria is the Education State, with the Allan Labor government implementing a range of policies to ensure all students get the best start in life, because Victoria is the Education State and it is always a pleasure to speak about education in this house. I will start my contribution today with a shout-out to my mum, who spent her entire career teaching in public schools. She was such a great teacher that on many occasions I wished she was my own teacher too.

There are a number of significant education upgrades taking place in the electorate of Lara, and with my time today I would like to highlight three of these that the Allan Labor government has made investments in. Western Heights College in Hamlyn Heights has an incredible specialist sports program, providing a unique opportunity for student athletes to pursue their passion for sports while receiving a quality education. Students can take part in specialist programs in AFL, basketball, netball and soccer. Additionally, these programs offer students valuable insights into career pathways in sports-related industries. But despite this program, students at Western Heights do not have an onsite gym and instead have had to use an old gym from their former campus or hire other community facilities. I acknowledge the Western Heights community, which has been advocating for the construction of a gym on campus for many years. All this will change for Western Heights thanks to this government. Last year's budget, which included \$2 billion for Victorian schools, included \$7.55 million to build a competition-grade gym onsite. It is a great development for the students and the college as a whole and one that I know is very exciting for local students and their families. Architects have been appointed and designs are underway. The site is cleared and ready to go, and it will be a fantastic community asset for years to come.

Northern Bay College and its five campuses are an integral part of the Corio and Norlane communities. Members may not know that Norlane is Victoria's most disadvantaged suburb and Corio is ranked eighth on that list. Rankings like these make public education and all of the supports that wrap around our students like breakfast clubs and the Smile Squad all the more important. The educational landscape of Corio and Norlane has been transformed over the last 15 years, with Northern Bay College being established as part of the Corio–Norlane education regeneration project, a project driven by Labor governments. The project brought together nine local schools to form a prep to year 12 college across five campuses. All four junior campuses, with students from prep to year 8, have been redeveloped, once again thanks to successive investments from Labor state governments. The Goldsworthy campus, which caters to senior students in years 9 to 12, is the last of these five campuses to be redeveloped, and this Labor government has invested \$17.2 million into the Goldsworthy campus to deliver a state-of-the-art performing arts centre, a new school entrance, admin buildings and new classrooms. The new facilities are nearly complete and will be ready for students to be learning in from term 2 this year. Northern Bay is a remarkable local school that is making a significant impact in the Corio and Norlane community, and this upgrade in the heart of Corio highlights the importance of education and provides students with a world-class learning environment that will benefit them for years to come.

When it comes to specialist schools, no government has invested more than this Labor government, because we recognise that students with all abilities deserve great education – and that is exactly what students will get in Victoria with great schools and great specialist teachers. As a candidate in the 2022 election I was blown away when I visited Nelson Park School in Corio. I was blown away by the

incredible teaching staff, their caring approach to students and of course the wonderful students themselves, who are achieving so much. This Labor government is funding redevelopments at both of Nelson Park's campuses, with \$10 million being invested at their Bell Park campus and \$6 million being invested at their Corio campus. And since 2015 under this government, every specialist school has received funding for a major upgrade. In the 2022–23 budget, which included \$658 million to upgrade and improve existing schools across Victoria, almost half of this investment – \$326 million – was dedicated to upgrades at specialist schools.

Every child deserves the very best start to life, and Victoria leads the nation, as we know, when it comes to early childhood education and care. We have committed \$14 billion to expand kindergarten programs across the state under our Best Start, Best Life reforms. This means that every Victorian child can attend kinder for free. This means we will build 50 government owned and operated early learning centres, an ambitious plan to address childcare shortages in the areas of greatest need. The first four of these will open in 2025, followed with 10 more in 2026 and the remaining 36 across 2027 and 2028, meaning that the best start to life is that much closer for so many Victorian children.

Under this government we have made kinder free. The Victorian government's \$270 million free kinder initiative is available to all three- and four-year-olds enrolled in participating kinders, and free kinder will save families up to \$2500 in fees per child per year. It provides much-needed relief for family budgets and gives women more choices when it comes to returning to the workforce. In 2023 approximately 97 per cent – or more than 2750 services – of funded kinders participated in free kinder, which benefited up to 140,000 children. We will establish pre-prep over the next decade – a new, universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based early learning for four-year-old children. And when it comes to schools, we have delivered more than 1300 school upgrades and 70 new school projects across the state, supporting more than 5000 construction jobs for Victorians. This year alone the Deputy Premier has opened 14 new schools with a total capacity of almost 9000 students in our growing suburbs. Ninety-six new schools have now been opened between 2017 and 2024, including 75 schools as a part of our commitment to open 100 new schools between 2019 and 2026.

I mentioned earlier that my mum was a public school teacher. She was an art teacher across many Victorian primary schools, and her stories and experiences from being a public school teacher are stories that I take with me into this role. She told me about kids who came to school not having had breakfast and without their lunch, kids who did not have the right uniform and did not fit in with their classmates and kids who could not go on school excursions because Mum and Dad could not afford them. What my mum's experiences have taught me is that sometimes the supports around a student are just as important as the classroom in which they learn, because children cannot learn on an empty stomach. Or if you have bad eyes, like me, you might be able to get your English right, but you definitely cannot do maths on the whiteboard without glasses. That is exactly why this government goes beyond building schools and also supports students and their families with everything that is needed for kids to get the very best start in life. This includes \$78 million for the incredible breakfast clubs program, which operates right across my electorate providing breakfast for schoolkids every day; \$48 million for the affordable school uniforms program; \$2.5 million for Glasses for Kids – I wish that had been around when I was in school; \$9 million for period products in schools; and a massive \$367 million for camps, sports and excursions so no kid has to miss out on having fun with their friends. It also includes support for travel to and from school, including concessions, and of course the Smile Squad, providing free dental care for kids.

On this side of the house our record is clear. Labor backs record investment in state schools and record investment in specialist schools. We recognise the importance of early learning. That is why we have introduced free kinder for every Victorian child. And we recognise the importance of the skills and qualifications that Victorians can learn at TAFE, which is why we rebuilt TAFE and introduced free TAFE. As the member for Buninyong mentioned earlier, free TAFE has supported 156,000 students in Victoria, saving them almost \$432 million in fees. On this side of the house we invest in TAFE and

we value lifelong learning, and those on the other side gutted it when they had the chance. They ripped out \$1 billion from Victoria's TAFE system, shut 22 TAFE campuses and sacked 2000 teachers.

But it is not just TAFE, and maybe some new members need a history lesson. We all know that Jeff Kennett closed schools and sacked teachers, and his record on education is clear. He closed 350 schools and sacked 7000 teachers. When Jeff Kennett closed the schools to sell them off, his friend Ted Baillieu sold them. Education changes lives, and Victoria is the Education State. On this side we are committed to investing. On the other side they are committed to cuts and closures.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (17:41): As the member for Lara just spoke about, being the Education State goes beyond building schools and facilities and shiny new openings and cutting ribbons. So I am going to talk today about what I know best, and that is my electorate, the tyranny of distance and trying to get to government schools when that tyranny of distance can be over 100 kilometres at a time. I had the chance recently to spend a lot of time in schools delivering books – I spoke about that earlier today – and I have met some exceptional young people from grades 3 to 6 all through Mildura and further south as well. But we do need to make sure – these schools cannot function properly without the proper support.

It is okay to say that we are doing this and there are facilities, because that support is easily accessible in metro Melbourne. It is easily accessible in Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong. But when you get out to what feels like district 12 to us most of the time, it is not easily accessible, nor is getting support, like the member for Kew said earlier. Mildura West Primary School have had two master plans. The last was in 2018. Their main building that children are learning in they have had to divide up on their own of their own accord, and the main building is being held together by plywood – by plywood! The only part of the master plan – the two master plans – that has been completed is one building, and a toilet block has been renovated. Bart from the P & C says that they are trying to fix a broken leg with botox and they actually need a reconstruction, and he is absolutely right. But trying to get that sort of support and getting someone from within the department to take this on board – and I have written to the minister; I have written to two different education ministers now, and still nothing. There has been a master plan – that is great. We do not want any more master plans; we want some action. We want our kids to go to school in a functional building that is not being held together by plywood and full of white ants.

When we talk about support, we talk about things like this. Yes, facilities are great. I have spoken about Mildura West, the Birchip Early Learning Centre and their school, Again, it has got the early learning centre onsite – great. You build it and they will come – yes, that is true, but I tell you what, build it big enough the first time. All they want to do now is add an extra room, and it simply means they need to move some water tanks for fire. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? You would think, but apparently not. They have been trying to do this for a number of years now. All it is is just a sign-off to be able to do this so they can extend the early learning centre. Again, these little things, these little supports for schools in the regions – the actual regions, like district 12 – have such a profound impact on the entire community. When you allow more children into free kinder and day care then you free up people that are able to go back to work as nurses and as teachers, because free kinder is great if you have got the spots for them; it does not really mean much if it is not available.

Also, I have spoken about the housing problem. It has been very topical recently. When I was on council in my previous role, about 2020, we started conversations with the Victorian School Building Authority and with the department about redeveloping teacher housing in Robinvale. Robinvale College – I was there this week too and I spoke about that and the brilliant kids there and the principal, who is still acting principal after 12 months. Again I will backtrack for a bit. When we talk about things in schools and having schools supported having a profound impact on the community, yes, Robinvale College has had its challenges over the past 10 years or so. They have an acting principal in there now that the community love. I hear every time I walk down the street, 'When is Nat the principal going to be appointed as our permanent principal?' She wants to embed herself in the community. When you see the school principal at local footy, at local basketball, living in the town

rather than commuting from over 100 kilometres away, that has such a huge impact on the community – that single move.

It is the stroke of a pen. This stuff is not hard, it is not rocket science. It is common sense. I talk about common sense in this place all the time because I like to sometimes think I am trying to make common sense sexy again. I do not know how far we are getting. We have a great principal in there now. Again, she has got this common sense where she has employed people within the community. Because we have a high Pacific Islander population, getting parents and people that are qualified to come in as teacher support – for teachers we do not always have – makes sense, because the behaviour of the kids there with their elders around makes a massive difference. These are little commonsense things.

When we talk about teachers at Robinvale College another commonsense move that the college has made is to bring in international teachers, particularly from Ireland. The limitation here is they are only six-month visas. On a 417 visa it is only six months, so they get halfway through the year and they are uprooted again and they have to go back. Surely there can be an exception – for somewhere as isolated as Robinvale – made so that they can stay. We have had some great stories about teachers coming out from Ireland to teach. They fall in love. In fact my next-door neighbour came out from Ireland to teach at Robinvale and married the spud farmer next door. You cannot write about this stuff. Now they have settled in the area and built a new house. They employ people. They are raising their kids there. This is the kind of impact we are talking about – if Victoria really was the Education State – that they would be thinking about, not just cutting ribbons to new facilities in the city. Let us talk about support in the regions and some commonsense approaches here.

Robinvale College – I will keep talking about that for a minute – has been flagged for needing emergency relief teachers and is on the critical list for receiving support. I have had a letter about this only today. Also yes, there have been challenges – the 100 to 115 young people that get on buses every day to go to Mildura is a pretty good indicator of the challenges that they have had. Hopefully that will subside if we get some stability within the school by appointing the principal permanently. That stability has such a huge impact, the stability that comes with having teachers stay for more than six months – I mean, this is just commonsense-type stuff. When we talk about the Education State we have to talk about the support that surrounds these schools, and those 100 to 115 kids that get on a bus every day to travel over 100 kilometres to Mildura get on a bus to go to a private school that has just paid \$2 million to expand. They are expanding so rapidly because kids are leaving government schools and going to St Joseph's College.

**A member:** That is absolute rubbish.

**Jade BENHAM:** It is actually not. Feel free to come down and ride the bus and go to St Joseph's any day of the week. I love it when people comment on something they know absolutely nothing about.

I will backtrack. I have got a couple of minutes left, so I will go back to what I was talking about on teacher housing. Again, there is department housing for these teachers in towns like Robinvale, Donald and Charlton. They are falling down. Honestly, they are almost unliveable, and they are on huge old blocks within these towns. I started some work when I was on council. There were ideas and conversations around, 'You know what? Let's see if the department can redevelop these houses.' You cannot make teachers live together. Why don't you redevelop these quarter-acre blocks and put one- or two-bedroom units on them, which creates its own little microcosm of activity and support within itself? Again, it makes sense, doesn't it? I would have thought so.

Again, that was in 2020, so it is four years ago now that those conversations were had. I had a conversation with the CEO of council yesterday, and – crickets; it is just stagnant. Again, this stuff makes sense. If the conversation started three years ago, you would have thought that construction would have started by now, because if you have not got anywhere to house a teacher in a town like Robinvale, for example, they end up living in Mildura – if they can get a house – and then commuting

into the sun heading south in the morning and then into the sun heading home at night. That wears thin. That is exhausting stuff, doing an hour-long drive into the sun both ways every day. You lose them to schools in Mildura. So when we talk about being the Education State, we need to talk about support for regional schools, and that is housing, that is support for teachers and principals and that is emergency teachers. Until we get that we cannot call ourselves the Education State. For now, we are nothing but the red tape state.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (17:51): I rise today to speak on this matter of public importance, noting that Victoria is the Education State, and this is the case despite years of cuts to education by those opposite when in government, resulting in hundreds of school closures. As a high school student during the Kennett era I was traumatised by school closure after school closure. Some of my friends were impacted by that – having to merge with other schools. It is quite a difficult challenge for a young person to abruptly be taken out of your school and have to make a new life for yourself in another school. But the Allan Labor government is investing significantly into our education system, starting from the little learners in three-year-old kinder right through to tertiary studies.

I would like to start with our early childhood reforms. The Allan Labor government has committed \$14 billion to expand kindergarten programs across the state under our Best Start, Best Life reforms, with 50 government owned and operated early learning centres. This initiative is a great plan to address childcare shortages in areas of greatest need, and one of those areas benefiting from this plan is located right in the heart of my electorate of Mulgrave. In 2026 Harrisfield Primary School will be home to one of these co-located centres, and what this means is that school drop-offs will be easier for parents in my electorate. It means children in my electorate will have greater opportunities to have an early education, and we know that the research shows that three-year-old kinder offers numerous benefits to children and their families. Not only is the Allan Labor government making kinder free but as a psychologist I know that this initiative and investment in our future generation will help children with socialisation, emotional development, cognitive development, language development, independence, preparation for school and early identification and intervention for any developmental delays and learning difficulties, to name just a few benefits.

I mentioned free kinder. The Allan Labor government has committed \$270 million into free kinder for three- and four-year-olds. This will help families save \$2500 in fees per child each year. It gives women a chance to return to the workforce and benefits up to 140,000 children. Instead of closing schools, we are building schools. In fact, as we have heard, 14 have just opened this year alone, supporting 9000 students and creating 1600 infrastructure jobs and 333 ongoing jobs in schools – just this year alone. Our reforms to early childhood education do not stop there. Within the next decade we will establish pre-prep, a new universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based early learning for four-year-old children, because we know that education starts early.

Across the state Victorian schools are getting access to world-class teaching materials and classrooms. Last budget the government announced a \$2 billion infrastructure package for schools across the state. This includes funds designated for acquiring new land for schools in our growing areas and over \$500 million in new assets for schools across the state.

**Paul Edbrooke:** How much?

**Eden FOSTER:** \$500 million. Our modernisation upgrades for schools, worth over \$355 million from the last budget alone, are upgrading 47 schools across the state, including in my electorate of Mulgrave. No matter the school, this government is supporting those who need it most, both public schools and low-cost independent and Catholic schools.

Last week I visited Nazareth College in Noble Park North, a wonderful area of my electorate. Nazareth has recently opened brand new food technology and media spaces for their students, funded by the state government. When I visited these new spaces I saw firsthand the positive impact the Allan

government is making, giving students new opportunities to discover their lifelong passion and gain new skills that will help them over their future years.

Providing a good-quality schooling system is not the only priority of this government. It is also a priority to ensure that families and students are provided with the appropriate support networks to continue their studies and remain in schools. I note that schools are not just for education, they are a community – they are about supporting families and they are about supporting the young person through their wellbeing, through their academic supports and through their social connections.

This especially applies for kids that have additional needs through their schooling. That is why since 2015 we have provided almost \$750 million in assistance to help families with the cost of education. This includes, as we have heard, breakfast clubs to make sure that every student starts the day with a full stomach to help with their concentration; State Schools' Relief, supporting families that are in severe financial hardship; Glasses for Kids, ensuring that kids with eyesight difficulties are given all the support that they need to succeed at school; sanitary products, ensuring access to essential hygiene products for all individuals; money for camps, sports and excursions, making sure that no child is left out of these critical events in their youth; and affordable school uniforms, reducing the risk of bullying towards kids from disadvantaged backgrounds.

I understand what it is like for a family to not have the finances to be able to afford new school uniforms or attend an excursion because it was too expensive and the things a family often goes without for their children to attend school camps or excursions. I know firsthand of the financial struggles many families face, and the Allan Labor government is assisting families with its strong investment into education. As a former school psychologist, I saw the difference that these programs made. The more indirect benefits of these programs of mental health, fitness and academic achievement are also crucial in ensuring Victorian kids are given the greatest opportunities possible and making sure that no matter the postcode you live in you will receive a good-quality education in this state. These measures are all just as important as providing good-quality schools, because there is no point in having the best schools in this country if kids from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to access our great education.

This government understands the role that education plays in providing opportunities to kids from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly Indigenous students, kids from poorer families in the outer suburbs and regions and kids with disabilities. Only a few months ago, in December last year, the Minister for Education announced a further 37 schools will share in more than \$9 million to create facilities suitable for students of all abilities as part of the ninth round of this government's Inclusive Schools Fund. Since its establishment the fund has supported children of all abilities, ensuring they are able to enjoy their school lives in the playground, in class and in school clubs. This is on top of funding upgrades to every single specialist school in the state since 2015. We understand the roles these important schools play in our education system, and I am proud that my electorate is home to two of these amazing schools, Springvale Park Special Development School and Monash Special Development School, which both the Premier and Deputy Premier visited with me late last year. This government has invested over \$20 million in both schools combined.

I move on quickly to tertiary education, as it is also a crucial pipeline for additional skills, whether that is through the TAFE system or university. This government brought TAFE back from the dead. Those opposite in their time in government killed it, closing 22 campuses across the state and gutting the resources for those that remained. Free TAFE is possibly one of the biggest reforms this government has achieved. More than 150,000 students in Victoria have accessed vocational education on the free TAFE list. More courses are even being added, with six added just last year and four added this year. Our support for tertiary education includes students going to university. Our scholarships for those studying nursing are nation leading and remove more barriers to entry for students wanting to take up nursing as a career – exactly what we need. We are supporting those starting secondary teaching in a similar manner. All students who enrol in secondary teaching this year or in 2025 can access our scholarships, guaranteeing a pipeline of new teachers for our great state schools. No other state or

territory can match the number of free or supported tertiary courses that Victoria offers, confirming our spot as the best place to study further education and as the state that is the Education State.

I will continue for the next 17 seconds. From early education and kindergarten to tertiary education throughout the state, this government is backing students and families. That is why I am proud to speak on this matter of public importance today.

### *Bills*

#### **Statute Law Revision Bill 2024**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (18:01): It is sort of déjà vu; I think I was talking about the importance of amending legislation. Whether it is a small, tiny rectification over omissions or typographical errors, this is very important legislation. I think I was talking a little bit about, for example, how it is important for legislation to be exactly watertight, because it is the vehicle to provide services to Victorians, support to Victorians and also protections to Victorians. The example I think I was talking about was the Porter Davis collapse, where many customers or homebuyers were having their homes built by Porter Davis when that collapsed. Then it was discovered that the company did not have the insurance that was important to protect consumers in the event of such events, and the state government had to step in and support many of the first home buyers to provide the compensation and to ensure that things would happen as if they had the insurance that they, through no fault of their own, did not realise that they did not have.

Another good example of why legislation requires amendments and change from time to time, and this is a more substantial example, is the legislation regarding sunset clauses. Again I am talking about protection for homebuyers, because there is a lot of this going on – a lot of building happening in the Thomastown electorate, particularly in the newer suburbs of Wollert and the north of Epping. We have had cases where again the Labor government had to step in, when developers were abusing the sunset clauses of legislation that were supposed to protect the consumer by ensuring that if a house was not built or the transaction did not happen in time, they could actually declare that transaction null and void. In actual fact developers were using sunset clauses as a loophole and using that to sever the contract that they had with a homebuyer because land prices were going up so fast they could make a much bigger profit if they resold it on. This was a really substantial loophole that required legislative amendment to ensure that that loophole was addressed. Again, that is another reason why we often have to amend many pieces of legislation, because sadly often there are people that find ways to exploit legislation, to find gaps and holes, and then we are always sort of chasing back and using that experience to provide further protections.

Of course when we are talking about housing – I know that there have been lots of questions during question time – I look at the new Epping social housing that has been built in record time in the electorate of Thomastown. There are I think something like 150 new dwellings. That was a partnership between a private developer, Riverlee, in collaboration with the City of Whittlesea, the Victorian government and Haven Home Safe and also Ramsay Health, because this is a project that not only provides social housing and affordable housing but also provides additional health care. This is going to be an incredible project, also with lots of open space and native flora and fauna. Of course the state government contributed money through the housing growth fund, and we hope to see that project continue and be more and more successful. So that is yet another example of what this state Labor government is doing, the Allan Labor government, to support, protect and provide for Victorians and also the absolutely crucial role that the legislation plays in this in terms of ensuring that these services can be delivered and entities that deliver these services are also properly working. This legislation, which is of course many, many amendments to many, many different pieces of legislation, is important, and it is something that we should all be supporting.

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:06): Acting Speaker Walters, it is lovely to see you in the chair. I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

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

### *Motions*

#### **Apology for past care leavers**

**Debate resumed on motion of Natalie Hutchins:**

That this house takes note of the parliamentary apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care.

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (18:07): Acting Speaker Walters, it is great to see you in the chair. What a terrific job I reckon you will be doing, too. Look, you see? He is smiling; he agrees with me.

I am very grateful to be speaking on this motion today. I acknowledge and I apologise to the many adults who as children experienced historical abuse in institutional care in this state. I thank the Premier for her honest and inclusive apology that showed care and respect for those Victorians, for her commitment and for her thought and her consideration that she put into her speech. I join the Premier in her apology, and I say sorry to all Victorians who were historically abused, neglected or mistreated in historical care in this state before 1990.

This is a shameful part of our history, and it is a history that is hard to face. It is hard to face hurtful and ugly truths, but we need to, and we need to respectfully acknowledge what those Victorians endured and how it affected their adult lives. We know that this motion is not a magic salve. We know that it will not wipe away this history or erase the hurt that was caused. It does, I hope, send a message that we know and that we do understand the hurt that was caused – we do know what that hurt meant and what it cost. I do hope that with this motion our apology is accepted by those Victorians who were hurt in our care and that it pays respect to those Victorians who are no longer with us.

For most Victorians home is where we should be safe. Home is more than a building; it should be a refuge and it should be a sanctuary. We know that home for these children was not safe; it was not a refuge and it was not a sanctuary by any means. These government institutions were far from being a home.

We have heard stories of the careless cruelty, the often intentional cruelty, and the shameful behaviour of those who turned a blind eye, who moved away, who turned their back, who should have acted and who should have stepped in to protect these children. We have heard stories of a government that chose to remove children from their homes or from homes of families struggling to make ends meet and single mums trying to keep their families together.

Acting Speaker, with your indulgence, I will talk about my nan, June Prendergast, who was a single parent in the 1960s raising three girls on her own – with the help of government; with public housing and on the deserted wives pension. But the burden that my nan carried, one of the many burdens, was continuing to ensure that her house and everything in it was pristine when the government came around to visit – when the government came to look in her drawers to see if there were men's clothes in there, when the government came to look in her cupboards to see what was there to feed children, when the government came to check the rubbish bins to see what was in there and to see if there was any evidence of men that might have been around. This fear of losing my mum and her sisters never left my nan.

My nan lived with Parkinson's for many years as she grew older, and unfortunately she also had Lewy body dementia. So when she was in care it became apparent to us how this fear never left her, because in her dementia she was calling out for her girls and trying to make sure that her girls were not taken away from her. That fear that she had was because of government behaviour – it never left her. She was lucky that she was able to keep her girls with her, and my heart absolutely breaks for those families whose children were not able to stay with them. The pain that my nan had just from that fear – imagine the pain that is with you when that fear is realised and your children are taken from you. It is just horrendous.

A government who was assuming responsibility for those children completely failed to protect those children – completely failed to show those children love. To those survivors who have felt shame because of these careless, heartless actions of cruelty, I am sorry – but we, not you, should carry your shame. The shame is ours and the shame sits on our shoulders and on the shoulders of governments before us, every single one of them. Our government has said sorry, and we mean it. On behalf of our government and the governments before us, we apologised to the children and the families we failed. So much was taken from these children and their families: we took their childhood, we took their sense of self and their identities, their playfulness, their joy, their happiness. We failed to prepare those people for what the future could bring – those opportunities that could be there for them, that joy that could be there for them.

We raise our children to face the world, and we prepare them for wherever their future can take them. We raise them to be resilient, we raise them to have expectations and we raise them to be confident and to be healthy. We are supposed to invest in them and we are supposed to nurture them, but these children did not have that, and it was owed to them – a government owes it to their children. The future they should have had was taken from them. We should have supported them to find a world ready to embrace their dreams and their potential. We should have created a platform for them to springboard into the world with confidence, feeling supported, feeling that they could be whoever they wanted to be, not feeling that they had to find corners of the world in which to try and repair themselves. They were given trauma, abuse and neglect. They entered the world without the things that so many of us take for granted. The day-to-day ordinary tasks of adulthood must have felt extraordinary and overwhelming for a young adult who was not prepared.

What we now know about the abuse, the neglect and the mistreatment is unimaginable. And I know – we all know – some of it is unspeakable. This motion gives a voice to those who were kept quiet for far too long. It gives a voice to those who are no longer with us, and it gives a voice to those who draw strength in the face of adversity and have risen up. It gives a voice to those who fought against a system designed to dehumanise, a system designed to break their will, because after all many of them were just poor kids – what did they matter?

I absolutely have the utmost respect and admiration for those Victorians who were able to step up and tell their stories, who were able to share. Exposing that much vulnerability, exposing yourself as somebody who has been treated badly, is incredibly hard. It is incredibly difficult to expose that vulnerability. I absolutely pay my respect to them for being able to do so, for having that inner strength to be able to tell their stories.

I am glad that they have demanded recognition. I am glad that they have been able to be strong enough to allow us to apologise to them. I thank them for the privilege of allowing us to apologise to them, and to those who have accepted our apology I say thank you. I thank them for sharing their stories so that every Victorian child who experienced this abuse, this neglect and this mistreatment can be acknowledged. I thank those people for allowing us into their lives and I thank them for listening to our apology.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (18:16): I am pleased to rise today to talk on the take-note motion for the Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care. First and foremost, I want to express my deepest apologies and condolences to those who suffered at the

hands of this state. The stories shared with us are truly horrific, and I wish anyone that suffered my sincere support as they continue the difficult process of recovering and healing from this trauma.

While expressing this apology, I want to acknowledge that an apology is just an initial step towards making genuine and meaningful change to our systems and for the people who suffered and continue to suffer within them. Proper change within our state-run services must be achieved to ensure the vicious cycles of foster care, abuse and a lack of opportunity are no longer allowed to continue.

I have been having regular conversations with a constituent of mine named Crystal Challenger, someone who is incredibly resilient and one of the strongest, most determined mothers I have had the privilege to meet in this role. Crystal has courageously asked me to share her story today. Crystal is a single mother to Leroy, nine, and Shaleigh, seven, residing in Benalla. They have been on the priority housing waitlist for 12 months, requesting relocation within Benalla to non-condensed government housing.

I raised this concern with the Minister for Housing and on 3 November spoke with the minister's chief of staff in an attempt to urgently resolve Crystal's housing situation. In October her son Leroy witnessed a teenage neighbour fatally assault a resident in the housing area on Ballintine Street, Benalla. Meanwhile these teenage perpetrators have been acquitted and still reside in the housing area.

Crystal, along with her sisters, have been in state care at times and have been working so incredibly hard to not repeat history. On the day of the apology Crystal Challenger, whose mother was a ward of the state, received a call from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing regarding the future custody of her children. They had spent two weeks with their father because Crystal, bravely, voluntarily admitted herself into hospital due to mental health challenges. The housing insecurity is becoming overwhelming for her. Today she told me:

I would never have had children if I had known that I would be fighting the government to survive as their mother.

My mum went through this in care, and my fear is, I will be in the same position trying to defend my grandchildren.

When they talk about generational trauma and poverty, they just need to look at me.

I may have fallen through the cracks, but every day it feels like this government is holding me there.

I don't know how to break the cycle if I don't have a safe place for my kids to live.

Her son Leroy has been awaiting an appointment with the school psychologist since experiencing PTSD from witnessing the fatal incident. He has been redirected to Gateway Health. On 1 December he was then referred to Victims of Crime, but they have not been able to reach anyone. Crystal is currently seeing someone at one of the new local mental health set-ups in Benalla, but her son is only nine years old, so he is ineligible for financially supported mental health care. Crystal says:

I want to change this history for my children.

Acknowledging the serious crimes, abuse and institutional failures of our state is critical, and I hope that it does provide some respite to those who suffered at the state's institutions.

After reading the reports from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse into the locations of this abuse it was harrowing to hear survivors talk about the fears that came with living in these facilities, particularly those located regionally. A fear of disappearing was held by children living in isolated regional and remote residential institutions as they regularly witnessed other children, pregnant women and more taken away, often never to be seen again.

Unfortunately, this story, Crystal's story, is a testament to the ongoing issues within our state-run services and the significant amount of work that is still required. There are so many stories just like this one right across our state. I look forward to seeing more work being done in the near future to ensure that our apologies are more than just talk.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (18:21): It is indeed a privilege to rise in this place to speak to the take-note motion for the care leavers apology. I want to begin of course by acknowledging survivors across Victoria, who have so bravely told their stories on so many occasions to get us to this place and for this house to come together in the way that we did a few short weeks ago to apologise for the great injustices of the past. I too would like to offer my personal apology to all Victorians who have experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care. More than 90,000 Victorian children were placed in care between 1928 and 1990, many of whom, as we know, suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect.

For the grief of being removed from their parents and the years spent fighting to find their families, sometimes in vain, I join others in the house in expressing my sorrow. When I reflect on the day and the survivors that I spoke to on that day, I was taken in Queen's Hall by the looks on the faces of the people who were gathered. Their trauma was writ large on their faces. We only had to look and speak with the people who bravely came in to join us on that day to see that the pain and the suffering of the institutional trauma that they had experienced lived with them throughout their lives. It is a very brave thing indeed to live with that pain and trauma and then come into a Parliament and put your trust in a government again to do the right thing by you. That is where an apology is so powerful.

An apology is about, I think, this institution and the people that run it – the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Greens political party – being humble before the people of Victoria who have been harmed by actions of the state. We cannot erase the past, but we must acknowledge the damage done and we must always strive to do better and work to heal the hurt that has been caused at the hands of the state. We can and must recognise the pain and suffering and the hurt that survivors carry, and we must commit to a redress scheme that truly listens to those who have experienced this abuse.

I want to thank the Premier for her heartfelt apology on behalf of the Parliament, and I also want to note the Premier's acknowledgement that much of state care and much of the care system was founded upon deeply rooted classism within our society. What we saw, and why we had 90,000 children being brought up in institutional care, was arrogance of the state – a belief that somehow the government, the state, could do better at raising children than their parents could themselves.

One of the things that this government knows and that we are working to implement through initiatives like our early parenting centres is to ensure that every parent has the opportunity to be the parent they want to be – that is, to be supported to achieve their parenting goals, to form loving attachments with their children and to have the resources to care for them.

Poverty is not a crime, and yet it was treated as such, and indeed it continues to be in some quarters. The fact that children were not able to have the clothing, the food or the care perhaps that they needed at that time is no reason to remove them from their families. We need to wrap around children in this situation and their families to support parents to care for their children in their own homes. That seems and sounds like a very simple proposition, but it would appear that it is one that governments have struggled with over many decades to actually implement. So I stand here as a person absolutely committed to doing everything that we can as part of a Labor government to support families, to support parents and to support children living in poverty to recognise that that is not their fault or the fault of their family but is deeply rooted in inequitable structures that exist within our society.

Classism, the Premier spoke about. Sexism and racism also obviously impacted the opportunities that were provided to children in care. One of the greatest concerns is that institutional care took away children's curiosity, opportunities and capacity to dream of a better future and life for themselves. That is what institutional care was designed to do, and in so many cases it succeeded. We have much to learn from being humble in the face of the stories of people who have been so terribly treated by the state. It is only when we act with that humility I think that we can work to change. Again, the challenge to all of us is not to assume because we are elected members of Parliament or because we get to attain

positions of power and influence that we know best. We must always listen to the communities that we represent. We must reach out and listen to those who are most disadvantaged, those that do not have a voice, and make sure that we use the opportunities that we have as people in this place. I speak in particular to my government colleagues. When we have that great gift of government, we must take the opportunity every day to use its power for good and to transform the lives of children who still in our state live in disadvantage or marginalised circumstances.

Again reflecting back on how important that take-note motion was, I want to take this opportunity to reflect on the times that I have had the great honour of meeting with Leonie Sheedy. Leonie is quite an extraordinary woman – a care leaver herself and a person who was treated terribly at the hands of the nuns in Geelong. She is a woman who has devoted her life to stripping away the shame and stigma that was associated with being one of the care leavers or the forgotten Australians, a child that was brought up in an orphanage, to make sure that people felt empowered to tell their stories, because stories matter and stories will influence government and create policy change. That is what Leonie has done. She is quite an extraordinary woman.

**Darren Cheeseman** interjected.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** The member for South Barwon reminds me that Leonie in fact in her advocacy was critical to the apology to the forgotten Australians in the federal Parliament some number of years ago now and indeed the apology here in this place but also to the establishment of the Australian Orphanage Museum in Geelong, an aspiration for a long time of Leonie's and one that was able to come to realisation with a grant of \$2 million, I think, from the federal Labor government.

I am very privileged, as I said, to be able to speak on this motion today and again express my sorrow and say sorry to those vulnerable Victorians, children, who have been irreparably damaged by policies of this state. We must do better, we can do better and the Allan Labor government will do better.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (18:31): I would like to give my voice to the Victorian apology to children who were supposed to be cared for by the state, children that were often forcibly removed from their families to supposedly be cared for better in a so-called children's home. A children's home – it sounds like a nice place, a nurturing place, but in fact they were houses of horror, often brutal, humiliating, cruel and vicious, stifling all aspirations, hope and development. We are acknowledging and apologising to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care, including of course rampant criminal abuse but also the denial of basic things such as education and teaching children how to read and write. And while this apology refers to historical abuse, we all know that the effects of such abuse are not historical – they are lifelong, and in many cases they have cut lives short.

I want to acknowledge leaders that I know that have driven the fight for justice and acknowledgement from government: Leonie Sheedy, who has been referred to in other members' contributions, from the Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN); and also closer to my home, Alf and Bev, residents of the Thomastown electorate who have fought for their rights and the rights of all children to be safe. I know there have been many others who have worked and fought for justice, but these are the individuals that I know most.

My grandmother was in an orphanage for a short time. Her parents were migrants and had no childcare back-up. Her mother was gravely ill in hospital, and her father had no choice but to put them in care because he needed to keep his job – no carer's leave in those days. She never spoke of it, and we can only wonder of her experience, although it was probably lucky that her father was allowed to visit her every weekend, and she was only in there for a couple of months.

But the proper acknowledgement and apology for children in state care until now has been a missing piece in the tragedy of institutional abuse for children, and I say this and explain it by going back to 2011. In 2011 the then Liberal state government referred a reference to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into the handling of child abuse by religious and other non-

government organisations. I commend the Baillieu government for its courage at this time, because it was courage. I and Frank McGuire, as newly elected MPs, had been appointed to this committee prior to the reference. We were the two opposition members on it, and the committee received many submissions both in writing and in person and heard the most harrowing personal accounts of the crimes against children. It was in these hearings it became obvious to us that the reference only to religious and non-government institutions was too narrow and denied justice to those in state care and did not scrutinise the role of the state that had in effect given children to these religious and non-government institutions. But in doing so, as an ultimate failure of the children, the *Betrayal of Trust* report found that there appears to have been either limited or no state monitoring of these places, and the committee was informed of an example of a child being physically assaulted by a police officer when apprehended, having run away from care. The child told the police officer of the abuse, which resulted in the beating by the police, and then they were returned to the institution. This is just one example from the CLAN submission. As a member of the Victorian Allan Labor government, I am deeply sorry and very, very angry.

During the Betrayal of Trust inquiry we heard many examples of individuals telling people in authority – elected representatives, police, church leaders, department representatives – about what had happened to them and what was happening to them, and it seems at the time of the offending not one adult bothered to inquire, investigate or check. This is truly astounding, and I hope that this apology unanimously endorsed by the Victorian Parliament means that we will all be vigilant and we will never dismiss allegations no matter how horrific and no matter how shocking, because they might actually be true.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (18:35): I would just like to begin by acknowledging that the content of this debate might be distressing for some people. If people are watching online, understand that this is a difficult conversation that we are having.

I am absolutely compelled to rise to speak on this take-note motion on the historic apology by this government to survivors of historic abuse in institutional care as so many people in my community have been affected by it and one sees those effects that go on, sadly, through generations. I am very proud of the care and consideration with which our Premier delivered her apology on our behalf, and I join her in offering an unreserved apology to those children who were abused and neglected during their time in care. As wards of state the children had the right to be protected by the state, and we failed them, and for that we are sorry. It is estimated that more than 90,000 children were placed in care in Victoria prior to 1990, many of whom experienced physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse. The Victorian government committed to making the apology following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The scars from those dark times run deep and are still obvious in my community in Ballarat. Ballarat was home to two large orphanages: the Ballarat Orphanage, which was initially known as the Orphan Asylum, and Nazareth House. Nazareth House was opened in December 1888, and it was to care for girls aged between six and 16. Nazareth House discontinued the care of children from 1976, and it is now an aged care facility. The Orphan Asylum opened in 1865 on Victoria Street in Ballarat. It became the Ballarat Orphanage in 1909 and finally Ballarat Children's Home from 1968 until finally closing in 1984. It is now the site of my local IGA. When the site was being developed there was a wall that sat around the block where the orphanage had stood, and people from within the community were determined to protect that wall so that we would never forget what happened between those walls.

The Ballarat Orphanage is a large two-storey Gothic-style building dating back to 1865. In his submission to *Forgotten Australians*, Frank Golding tells us of his first reactions to the imposing buildings:

I snatched at each shaft of the iron fence as the policeman pulled us towards the great double gate. The gravel crunched under our feet as we drew near the dark-red building. Looking up to the balcony on the second floor, Billy read to us the cast iron words 'ORPHAN ASYLUM 1865'. This was a grim place, this Ballarat Orphanage. Solid, like a fortress.

Ballarat Orphanage was the new name given in 1909 to the former asylum, and it accommodated boys and girls from around Victoria aged between four and 16. As I said, finally in 1968 the name changed to the Ballarat Children's Home.

The Ballarat Orphanage accommodated a large number of Aboriginal and Koori children, many of them having been removed from their families in western Victoria. The importance of the institution to Indigenous people is recognised by the former site of the orphanage's inclusion on the Ballarat Koorie Heritage Trail. Murray Harrison, a Wotjobaluk man originally from Dimboola, and two of his sisters were removed from their family in Bruthen in Gippsland and sent initially to the depot at Royal Park and then to the Ballarat Orphanage.

I have the honour of knowing Uncle Murray and have met with him many times. I am always struck by his generosity of spirit. He talks about the love of his wife, who changed his life, and he continues to work tirelessly in our community to raise awareness of the stolen generation. When the Premier offered the apology in this place I was pleased to see Alan Harris in the gallery. He too lived in institutional care in Ballarat. Again, I am struck by his warm and compassionate nature. That these men continue to show love and generosity in the community is testament to their courage and strength.

In 2002, 14 former state wards filed a lawsuit against the government of the state of Victoria, alleging a systematic campaign of cruelty, physical beatings and sexual abuse at the hands of some Ballarat orphanage staff members, particularly in 1963 and 1964. But those charges that were filed against the then 88-year-old former superintendent of Ballarat orphanage were withdrawn by the Director of Public Prosecutions due to his age. But in 2021 a very good journalist with the ABC in Ballarat, Charlotte King, whose work I admire enormously, discovered credible allegations of abuse by Sedgman, who was the superintendent in 1964. She reported that in an investigative program, *Background Briefing*.

In 1998 the organisation became Child and Family Services Ballarat Inc. I would like to stop here for a moment to acknowledge the extraordinarily good work of that organisation, CAFS. They have never shied away from the dark history of the organisation, and they work tirelessly to support children and young people and families in our community. They support over 7000 people a year in our region. I just want to acknowledge that CAFS do extraordinary work, and in no way do I include them in the atrocities that have gone on before.

The Victorian government committed to making the apology following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Words can carry a lot of weight, and certainly no more than these: we are sorry, we hear you, we see you. But they must also be followed by action. The government is working to roll out a redress scheme first flagged in 2022, and the scheme will cover historical abuse cases from 1928 until 1990, during which, as I have said, 90,000 Victorian children were placed in care. The government has committed \$7.5 million to create the redress scheme for people who experienced child abuse and neglect while in care, and there are advance payments of \$10,000 for people who were abused or neglected in care while that program is being delivered. We acknowledge that many people have suffered for a lifetime and many are ageing, and that support is there for them as the redress scheme is being developed.

I would also like to acknowledge the good work of the services and supports that exist for Victorians who were in institutional care. Many in this place have today talked about the great work of Open Place, which is a specialised statewide support service for pre-1990 care leavers. They provide a whole range of services, including counselling, promotion of family and community connectedness and financial health and practical needs, but also access to records and searching for family. They provide an extraordinary support, and so does Care Leavers Australasia Network, which is our national independent peak body that represents and advocates for pre-1990 care leavers. Again, they offer counselling and assistance with locating family members, social get-togethers and advocacy and referrals.

But for every dollar of compensation that we can make, we can never change this terrible stain on our history. Children who should have been protected were subject to abuse and neglect. I hope that this apology will offer some solace – that we know we let you down, that we are very sorry. We understand that institutional care took away, for many, bright futures that children dream of. We deprived them even of the opportunity to learn to read and write. We must make sure that this never happens again. As the previous minister said, we must listen to the voices in our community. We must trust survivors when they speak to us. We must make sure that it never happens again. Finally, what I would like to say is: thank you to all of those brave, brave souls who came forward to tell us their experience, to tell us what they went through, because it was their voices that have made this apology a reality. So I thank them, and again I say: we are sorry.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (18:45): I rise to speak on the parliamentary apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care. Growing up in Geelong I was very fortunate to have a loving family, a roof over my head, parents who had employment, food on the table and security. Little did I know at the time that Geelong in particular had a very dark history where children did not have that security and care of a stable environment.

It was when I was working in a federal government as an electorate officer that I met Leonie Sheedy – she has been spoken about in this place – at an organisation called CLAN, the Care Leavers Australasia Network. After meeting Leonie, it was like she had grabbed my shoulders or jolted me and awakened me to a chapter in our Geelong history, a place I have lived in my whole life yet where a reality existed that I remained blissfully ignorant about. It was from Leonie that I learned about the large amount of orphanages that were established in the Geelong region, a greater number than any other city in Australia outside a capital city.

I then visited the Australian Orphanage Museum that CLAN had established. I have visited a couple of times now, and I learn something new each time. I can only encourage people to go to the museum. It is based in Geelong, but it is very much a national museum with a national story. When you visit there you experience and learn the stories of children who grew up in institutions under the care of people who were meant to look after them. The museum is a poignant journey into that national narrative of suffering but resilience. These children entrusted to caregivers who instead inflicted cruelty and betrayal demanded to be heard. The museum is a unique experience, documenting in exhibitions authentic social history about the experiences of growing up in orphanages, in homes or in missions or other institutions, including foster care, in Australia.

The museum was established by care leavers for care leavers. That is their history that is visible now to all Australians. The collection contains hundreds of items from homes, and every object in that museum has a story to tell. I must say that visitors will be confronted by the stories, but the museum aims to raise awareness about the abuse, neglect and trauma these children suffered while being a place to learn and to understand. It is important for us as visitors to, while learning, be open and listen. I thank the CLAN volunteers and their team for their tireless work not only at the museum but through their continued advocacy. Through this museum your stories are being told, and with them your experiences are out of the dark.

But how did CLAN form? It started over 30 years ago with another extraordinary woman named Dr Joanna Penglase, who had put an ad in the local paper. She was doing a thesis at university and reached out to people like her who had grown up in homes and institutions and orphanages, asking for people to ring her to tell their stories. Well, a lot of people rang, and one of those people who did pick up the phone and ring Joanna was Leonie Sheedy. It was a phone call that changed both their lives. Together they established CLAN – dedicated to fighting for recognition, fighting for justice, fighting for an apology and fighting for compensation. Over those years they have fought. They fought for a Senate inquiry into children in institutional care, they fought for an apology from the Prime Minister, and they fought for the federal government's royal commission. And make no mistake, Leonie is still fighting today.

## MOTIONS

Wednesday 6 March 2024

Legislative Assembly

801

With that continued advocacy from CLAN, forgotten Australians and care leavers here in Victoria this year, on 8 February, received that formal parliamentary apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care, from the Premier.

This apology was the Victorian Parliament's opportunity to formally recognise and apologise for the wrongdoings committed against children. Children through no fault of their own had suffered. To those who endured unspeakable horrors, we extend our sincere apologies, although we know words alone cannot heal wounds so deep. To quote the Premier:

To those children, who were abused and neglected during their time in care, we humbly and unreservedly apologise.

...

For the grief of being removed from your parents, often without explanation – and the years spent fighting to find your family, sometimes in vain.

To those who died without getting the respect or recognition they deserved.

To the children who lost their lives while in the guardianship of the state, whose voices were silenced forever.

And to the families who were broken, permanently.

We failed you. For this, we are deeply sorry.

I thank the Premier for her heartfelt apology on behalf of the Parliament to those who suffered the unimaginable harm at the hands of the state. An apology was long overdue. To those Victorians who suffered: I too am sorry.

Reflecting on this momentous apology, though, I am humbled by the courage displayed by survivors braving that emotional storm to bear witness. The scars, both seen and unseen, serve as a constant reminder of the systematic failures that robbed them of their innocence and security. And I want to acknowledge those who died without witnessing recognition or justice for what happened. It is tragic that they had not been heard.

In reflecting also on that day I must say it was an emotional day for many of us as members of Parliament, but that it was nothing compared to the emotional toll and the courage needed by survivors to come here and to hear the apology. To sit here in the gallery or to watch in Queen's Hall, to watch online or to go to a streamed venue takes enormous courage. After the apology I walked through Queen's Hall and spoke to a few of those familiar faces from the Geelong region. For them, they shared how much the day meant and how much that apology meant to them. One reflected on his own family, on those who had passed, and what this day would have meant for them. I am always struck by the resilience of individuals.

But apologies, however heartfelt, are only the first step, and we owe it to those who have suffered to take tangible action – to ensure that voices are not just heard but amplified – and we must heed the guidance of organisations like CLAN, Open Place, Alliance for Forgotten Australians and others, offering solace and advocating for justice. The scars of the past should serve as a constant reminder of our collective responsibility to foster healing and prevent such atrocities from happening ever again. Together we must continue to advocate for justice and provide support to those affected by historical abuse and neglect, ensuring that their stories are never forgotten.

It has been a long journey for many. As described, in 2009 a formal apology was given by the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and in 2013 the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was instituted by the Gillard government. The final report handed down by the royal commission stated:

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and those who represent and support them, had advocated consistently for government action.

...

For victims and survivors, telling their stories has required great courage and determination.

...

It is now apparent that across many decades, many of society's institutions failed our children.

It went on to say:

It is the responsibility of our entire community to acknowledge that children are vulnerable to abuse. We must ... resolve ... what we can to protect them. The tragic impact of abuse for individuals and through them our entire society demands nothing less.

I could not agree more. The 2009 national apology was also a significant moment, and when it was delivered it was hoped that it would offer individuals validation by ensuring that their stories were heard and believed and promoted emotional and psychological healing. I really hope that the Victorian parliamentary apology earlier this year offers the same, in that it is healing from that dark past.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (18:55): I am deeply humbled and privileged to take note of this Parliament's apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse or neglect as children in institutional care, which was delivered by the Premier on Thursday 8 February in this place. I wish to acknowledge any survivors or their loved ones who may be in the gallery or watching online today. On my own behalf, as the member for Kororoit, I say to those children who were abused or neglected during their time in care, I am sorry. For the grief of being removed from your parents or loved ones, I am sorry. To the children who lost their lives while in the guardianship of the state, I am sorry. And to the families who were broken, I am sorry. This is an apology which I make without qualification. Thursday 8 February was certainly a day in this place that I will never forget. On behalf of this Parliament and every Parliament of Victoria before it, the Premier moved a historic apology for past care leavers. Let me say that I am conscious that many of the survivors of this institutional harm we are discussing reject the term 'care leavers' being applied to them. They may simply wish to be known as survivors, and I fully respect that.

To continue, as I looked over the public gallery in this place that morning I was truly awestruck by the presence of the survivors and their loved ones and carers who had joined us here on that day. As the Premier delivered this Parliament's apology, and as she was joined by the Leader of the Opposition and the Greens, I watched the people in the gallery go through a full range of human emotions before us. I saw on people's faces sorrow and hurt that morning, but I also saw glee. At some stages that morning the people in the gallery were smiling. At other points they were crying. When we remember that 90,000 is the number of Victorian children who between 1928 and 1990 were placed in so-called care by the state, those people in the gallery must have represented only a small fraction of these survivors. Their individuality was no less for that, and yet in the range of emotions and in the basic dignity that was on display it was as if these people were here not just as themselves. It was as if they were radiating the lives of all survivors of their common experience – those 90,000 souls, both living and no longer living, the people who are still here with us today and those from the past generations as well. And that is the beautiful thing about humans. It was the rawest and the best of humanity. It was an experience that brought a tear to my eye, and as I said earlier, it is one that I will never forget.

There was another reason why it moved me so deeply. As I looked across the public gallery, I was equally struck by the number of disabled people and their carers that were here. It moved me because of my uncle Ken, and I have already spoken a little about Uncle Ken and my family upbringing in my inaugural speech in this place. Uncle Ken is my mother's younger brother. He has been a part of my and my brother Robbie's lives for as long as I can remember, just like my mum has. Growing up, Uncle Ken was always our biggest fan. He would be cheering us on at basketball games, and he would always be there to support us at home. Uncle Ken was born with a disability. Ever since he was born he needed 12 or more pills a day just to keep him going, and his first carer was our nanna. After she died, Mum took over. When Uncle Ken was in his 30s the doctor told us – I was there, and I will never forget this – that because of the amount of substances going into Uncle Ken's body he would not possibly live past the age of 40. Our doctor told us to cherish every moment with him. Uncle Ken was

there, and he heard all of this that day. And can I tell you all here, Uncle Ken is turning 71 next Tuesday – he has not gone anywhere. I am so blessed to have my uncle Kenny in my life, because he has taught me to see the person and not the disability. Uncle Ken has lived life his way, and we are all so proud of him for it. He is the gentlest of all souls, and while we gave him a home, it was he who was always healing us.

My brother and I shared the caring responsibilities for Uncle Ken with Mum as we were growing up. After we moved out, Mum became his sole carer. He and Mum now live together in a retirement village, and Uncle Ken has a part-time carer who comes in a few days a week. The incredible support that Uncle Ken's amazing carer provides him, along with my mum, has only given me an even fonder appreciation for all carers. If it were not for Uncle Ken's carer –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now, and the member may continue their speech when the matter returns to the house.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

### **Community safety**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (19:00): (561) My adjournment is to the Premier, and the action that I seek is that the Premier introduce stronger hate laws to ensure that the police have the powers to crack down on violent, hateful extremism. These laws were promised following a parliamentary inquiry that the member for Brighton and I sat on in 2021, and we need them now more than ever. Now is not the time for the government to be sitting on their hands.

Social cohesion is at an all-time low, and many Jews, who have contributed so much to our great state, no longer feel safe. This morning the *Herald Sun* reported that an anti-Israel extremist allegedly kidnapped and assaulted a Palestinian Victorian because he dared to work for a Jewish boss. I cannot believe I would ever have to say that. Jews in Caulfield have been blamed for a fire at a burger shop even after the police categorically ruled it out. Thugs targeted Jews outside a synagogue on the Sabbath, forcing it to be shut down. Many Jews are too scared to go into Melbourne's CBD. Children are afraid to look visibly Jewish when they walk to school. Community organisations have spent tens of thousands of dollars on security to keep themselves safe. The personal information of Jews has been shared online to target them on the dark corners of social media.

The far right and the far left stand united on two things: they hate Jews, and they hate the success of the great multicultural state that we have. These extremists storm council meetings, intimidate and assault Jews outside of them and threaten councillors for not supporting these motions. These extremists take over our streets, destroy private property and glorify hatred in our CBD. These extremists are determined to ensure that nobody in our community – nobody – can feel safe. The time has come to say 'no more': no more hate, no more division, no more violence, no more extremism. That leadership must start at the top. I urge the Premier, as I urge every Victorian, to stand proud and stare down extremism. I urge the Premier to strengthen our Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to help every single Victorian in our great state feel safe again. Premier, the time to act is now.

### **Brentwood Preschool**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (19:03): (562) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at Brentwood Preschool in my electorate. Brentwood Preschool is one of hundreds across the state that have received a grant from the Allan Labor government to run a bush kinder program in 2024, and it is a terrific win for my youngest constituents, who will be able to access quality outdoor learning opportunities either

through programs delivered in offsite nature or by bringing the natural landscapes to the kinder. The evidence tells us that young children learn so much from spending time in nature. That is why we are investing \$3.6 million over four years to expand the bush kinder program so more Victorian kids get the opportunity to spend time outdoors in natural settings.

I would also love to use this opportunity to give a shout-out to Bambou Early Learning Centre in my electorate, which, just like Brentwood Preschool, also received a bush kinder grant this year. Just like Brentwood Preschool, they also consistently exceed the national quality standard across every benchmark, delivering world-class kinder for local families. I would like to thank all the early childhood educators for the work that they do and the terrific centre director Haritsa for her ongoing passion for early childhood education. It was terrific to visit Bambou ELC to meet with some of the youngest constituents and hand out some of the kinder kits last week. I even had a chance to read some of *Where Is Galah?*, my daughter's favourite book.

We know that our youngest Victorians deserve a great start in their development and learning, and it is why we are delivering nation-leading Best Start, Best Life reforms right across Victoria. That includes making three- and four-year-old kinders free, saving Victorian parents thousands of dollars per child per year. We are investing in better facilities with the Building Blocks upgrades and the rollout of 50 government-run kindergartens in high-need areas. Plus we are recruiting more world-class early childhood educators and investing in more ongoing training and support to bolster workforce retention. We are witnessing the biggest transformation in the early childhood education system in Victoria's history, and I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which is making it happen. I look forward to the minister's response, and I hope she can join me in the Glen Waverley district to celebrate the expansion of the bush kinder program.

#### **War Widows Day**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (19:05): (563) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Veterans, and the action I seek as the Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs is for this state to recognise 19 October as War Widows Day. We have over 38,000 war widows in Australia, and in recent years there has been a push to have this day recognised nationally across all jurisdictions. The inaugural War Widows Day was held in Queensland and New South Wales on 19 October in 2022, and last year the ACT, Western Australia and South Australia all came on board and recognised this date as War Widows Day. They were supported by their respective state and territory governments. It is not recognised in Victoria, the Northern Territory or Tasmania as yet, and that is what I would seek to change. One of the reasons that Victoria and Tasmania do not recognise this day as yet is because branches of the Australian War Widows are not operational in these states, but moves are currently afoot to address this. National president Jenny Gregory, who I have spoken with a few times over the last few weeks, has said that observance of this day would assist in establishing this network in Victoria. War Widows Day provides a focus for our community on the sacrifice of widows whose loved ones gave their lives for our country and on their role in supporting their families and supporting the communities at home while their partners were fighting for our nation. So I ask the minister to work with me as shadow veterans minister and Jenny as the national president to observe this day on 19 October this year, and on that date every subsequent year.

#### **Western Victoria fires**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:07): (564) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister joins me in my electorate to thank the Raglan fire brigade and other emergency services members and volunteers who worked tirelessly to protect locals during the recent bushfires. There were so many agencies and support services that worked around the clock to support our region in its time of need. This included over 2000 volunteer firefighters, Forest Fire Management Victoria teams and 20 aircraft that contained the fire. Without them, lives would have been lost, and we are all eternally grateful for all that they did.

I want to thank Rachael, Robyn, Melissa, Jane, Sherryl and Jenny from the Warrak hall, who helped make sandwiches and meals for emergency services crews, and all the incredible locals who helped feed volunteers in between shifts at the Elmhurst community hall. A big thankyou to all the council staff at relief centres in Ararat, Maryborough and Ballarat, who cared for people and their pets so beautifully. A shout-out to Tim, Mel, Paula, Jo, Paul, Chandra, Emma, Koyeh, Anita, Charlie and Phillipa from Ararat Rural City Council; to Emma, Belinda, Colleen, Sharlene, Kerry, Krystle, David and Sylvia from Central Goldfields Shire Council; and to the over 40 staff from the City of Ballarat. Together they supported a total of 429 people from across our region with food, clothes, warm beds, dinner vouchers and even facepainting stations for the kids. I also want to thank Wayne Rigg, who is an absolute legend – he helped set up the Ballarat base camp for 300 firefighters – and Brett Boatman, who worked around the clock as the CFA’s west region deputy chief officer to support brigades on the ground.

In times of crisis people’s compassion and sense of community shines bright. We saw this in Brock and Adam, firefighters who stopped and hydrated local wildlife by putting water in their helmets; Dan from Creswick, who offered up his cottage to Suzanne from Raglan after she lost her house; and all the CFA members from across districts 15 and 16 who made us all so proud. Our community is tired and they are devastated, but they are so grateful for all the resources that have been thrown their way too. They had each other’s backs during the fires, and I will be there with them as they recover from it all.

#### **Brighton electorate crime**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (19:09): (565) My adjournment is directed to the Premier, and the action I seek is for the state Labor government to issue a public apology to my community for ignoring the invasive crime increase in Bayside, following confirmation from Victoria Police that the wave first started in Bayside, contrary to the denials of former Premier Daniel Andrews. We know that over the last year Victoria Police has decreased in size by 3 per cent, and it has come down by 5 per cent over the last two years. On top of that, there are currently 1000 vacant positions that remain unfilled. This resourcing problem comes at a time when there has been a 33 per cent statewide increase in aggravated burglaries, and in my community of Bayside there has been a 43 per cent increase year on year, with 183 in 2023, up from 128 in 2022. In terms of burglaries, there were 24,881 recorded home burglaries across the state last year. That is a staggering average of 68 burglaries a day. Appallingly, late last year the state Labor government announced that 43 police stations will partly close. Bayside only has one station, and disappointingly it is one of the 43 slated for partial closure.

Victoria Police recently held a neighbourhood policing forum in Sandringham. The event allowed a panel of senior police to brief the community, and the information police provided to the forum was alarming. Police confirmed that resourcing is so scarce that police command was forced to shut stations to keep officers on the road and able to respond to emergencies. Police also confirmed that a group of around 290 young offenders are committing the majority of serious crimes, with 80 offenders having been arrested more than 10 times each over the past year. This is at a time when Labor plans to raise the age of criminal responsibility and weaken the state’s bail laws on 25 March by abolishing the offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail. Police also acknowledge that the court system is overflowing with cases and that it is not keeping up with offending that is occurring.

But one of the most locally relevant confirmations at the forum was that the aggravated burglary crime wave started in Bayside. My community knows that when local mother Bec Judd and I first raised these crimes in May 2022, the then Premier Daniel Andrews victim-blamed her and said that we did not understand the data and needed to learn more. Shame. Given the recent confirmation from police, I call on Labor to stop ignoring these pernicious crimes in my community and apologise.

#### **Westmeadows war memorial**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (19:12): (566) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Veterans. The action that I seek is for the minister to join me at the Westmeadows war

memorial to see firsthand the important role this beautiful monument plays in my community and to meet with students from Westmeadows Primary School, who are such passionate advocates for this important local monument. When it was erected in the years immediately following the First World War, the memorial was in the heart of old Broadmeadows. The centre of Broadmeadows shifted somewhat closer to the railway line in the years that followed and the area around the war memorial came to be known as Westmeadows. The memorial remains integral to our community.

Of course it has immense local historical significance, but it is also a focal point for contemporary commemoration. Each Anzac Day the Tullapark Scout Group run an overnight vigil at the memorial, with dozens of young people doing their bit with reverence and respect. At dawn hundreds of community members come together for a moving service. It is a simple memorial but deeply moving. It demonstrates the extraordinarily high level of volunteerism which characterised small rural communities across Australia, as old Broadmeadows, a hamlet nestled in a valley along the Moonee Ponds Creek, then was. It is worth recalling that these local memorials were incredibly important for those families who never had any prospect of seeing where their sons, their brothers or their fathers were buried in France, Belgium and Türkiye.

Veterans like those whose names are recorded on the Westmeadows war memorial have given so much to our state and to our nation. That is why I am proud of our government's Restoring Community War Memorials and Avenues of Honour grant program, given it is assisting with the restoration and upkeep of war memorials across our state. As I say, Westmeadows Primary School, which has been serving our community for over 150 years, does an outstanding job of commemorating our shared history and imparting a deep respect for the service and sacrifice of generations that have gone before us. When I met recently with a delegation of Westmeadows Primary School students to discuss their local war memorial I was so impressed by their passion for their community and its history and their compelling ideas for the restoration of the war memorial and its surrounding precinct. That is why I look forward to the minister joining me in Westmeadows to meet students and to visit our beautiful war memorial.

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (19:14): (567) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide my community, especially those in Pennydale, Cheltenham and Highett, with a comprehensive plan for managing and removing 6000 cubic metres of category A toxic waste from the Sir William Fry Reserve as part of the Allan Labor government's Suburban Rail Loop project in my community.

I bring the house's attention to an article in the *Age* newspaper of 28 January 2024 that reports that:

More than 1 million cubic metres of contaminated soil – including some waste that falls under the most toxic classification – will be dug up during the first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop, government documents show.

Category A waste, which is the highest reportable level and includes soil that can contain toxic gases and cannot be handled without treatment, will be largely found around the site ...

where the Suburban Rail Loop commences.

Construction workers ... will also handle large quantities of acid sulphate soil, which has the potential to become sulphuric acid if exposed to the wrong conditions.

The article goes on to say:

The most toxic classification is known as Category A. The documents expect 6000 cubic metres of this waste to be found in the area near the future SRL station at Cheltenham ...

in my community.

This type has not previously been identified in early assessments of the West Gate Tunnel or North East Link and as recently as 2019 there were no facilities available to handle it.

Needless to say, community members, especially around Pennydale, Cheltenham and Highett, are deeply concerned by reports that there is the most toxic category A waste known to be at the Sir William Fry Reserve, the start of the government's Suburban Rail Loop. I think it is entirely appropriate for the government to provide my community with a comprehensive plan, not just for the treatment of that toxic waste but for the removal of that toxic waste as well.

#### **Alamanda K-9 College**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:16): (568) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier within his capacity as Minister for Education. The action that I seek is for the Deputy Premier to accompany me on a visit to Alamanda K-9 College and see their upgrade and modernisation project. Of course many in this chamber will know Alamanda K-9 College and the excellent education that they provide. This upgrade is ensuring that those many students at that school, a well sought-after school – and it is great to see the opposition spokesperson for education at the table. She has mentioned Alamanda school as being a very large public school, in fact one of the largest, because it is so well loved and the education provided by teachers and educators at that school is so excellent. So I look forward to seeing the education minister attend there to see the wonderful progress of those building works.

#### **Kew electorate schools**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (19:17): (569) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is that funding is provided to schools in my electorate of Kew in this year's budget to ensure local schools have first-class teaching and learning facilities for continued outstanding education in our community. I made this ask to the minister's predecessor before last year's budget and was disappointed that when budget day came around there was no funding for a single school in Kew, Kew East, Balwyn or Balwyn North. The electorate of Kew is home to more than 30 schools and education is at the very core of our community. Our local state schools require their fair share of capital funding to be able to provide the education that our community deserves and expects. I have worked with and listened to many principals, teachers, school councils, students and parents across my electorate to understand their needs and the gaps that they have.

Prior to the election we on this side of the house had made commitments to funding critical upgrades at a number of local schools. It has been 80 years since Kew East Primary School received any significant state funding for capital works. I ask that the government commit to a \$6.5 million upgrade to replace the outdated buildings and build eight new permanent classrooms, a staff room and an office area. Canterbury Girls' Secondary College has had no substantive investment in decades. Back in 2021 there was an incident at the school where a wall collapsed. Luckily no-one was hurt. We committed to investing \$12.2 million in Canterbury Girls to prepare and deliver a new master plan for its campus. The school facilities are dated and impractical with spaces such as the science and art classrooms no longer supporting the needs of both teachers and students.

Balwyn Primary School is a thriving local primary school with consistently strong NAPLAN results. However, enrolments have nearly doubled since 2011 and facilities have not been upgraded. We call on the government to commit to a \$6.1 million upgrade for the development of a new school master plan and stage 1 upgrades, including new classrooms, much-needed toilet facilities, staff and sick bay facilities. Kew High School desperately needs their main building replaced. Decades-old, its dark, dated, small classrooms simply do not provide the learning spaces needed to deliver the best practice pedagogy the school's leaders and teachers can offer. It is also incredibly thermally inefficient, with the utility bills far in excess of the funding the school receives. Students are desperate to install solar panels to reduce the school's carbon footprint, but neither the main building nor the gym roof have the load-bearing capacity to do so. Tinkering around the edges with maintenance here and there will not deliver what Kew High School students need. Finally, I call on the government to commit to funding the next phase of the Victorian School Building Authority developed master plan at Chatham Primary School.

Labor holds 63 per cent of seats, but schools in their electorates have received 93 per cent of funds for school upgrades. The coalition holds 32 per cent of seats, but schools in our electorates only received 6 per cent of funds. This simply is not fair, and I call on the minister to action these important funding commitments in the electorate of Kew.

### **KooyongKoot Alliance**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (19:20): (570) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join you, Deputy Speaker, and me to visit the Gardiners Creek Reserve in Burwood and meet with members of the KooyongKoot Alliance. The KooyongKoot Alliance is an alliance of over 20 community groups who are working collectively as a voice for the creek and our community. With the help of its constituent members the alliance has been undertaking a significant revegetation program in Gardiners Creek Reserve, and it has been a pleasure for me to join them and lend a helping hand.

Recently the KooyongKoot Alliance received \$94,130 of funding under the Green Links grants program to help support them in their project of revegetating a further 12,000 square metres of riparian land within the Gardiners Creek Reserve, providing a valuable habitat for native flora and fauna along the creek. I would like to congratulate and thank the KooyongKoot Alliance, and in particular Alliance convener Graham Ross, for their hard work and advocacy in securing funding for the creek and for helping to improve habitat for native wildlife for the Box Hill community to enjoy. I look forward to the minister's response.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Before I call the minister, the member for Caulfield raised an adjournment item asking for legislation. There is a ruling from the Chair that says that is not allowed. However, within the member's question, he did urge the Premier for other action, so I have allowed the question based on that, and we shall move forward.

### **Responses**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:22): The member for Caulfield did raise a matter for the Premier. I will make sure that matter is passed on. The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Children. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans; the member for Ripon, a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services; the member for Brighton, another matter for the Premier; the member for Greenvale, a matter for the Minister for Veterans; the member for Sandringham to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop; the member for Point Cook to the Minister for Education; the member for Kew to the Minister for Education as well; and the member Box Hill to the Minister for Water. I will make sure those matters are referred to the relevant ministers.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7:23 pm.**