

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 10 September 2025

CONTENTS

BILLS

Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025	1
Introduction and first reading	1
Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	1
Introduction and first reading	1
Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025	2
Introduction and first reading	2

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of motion and orders of the day	2
---	---

DOCUMENTS

Documents	2
-----------------	---

MOTIONS

Motions by leave	3
------------------------	---

RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR

Unparliamentary language	3
--------------------------------	---

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Health services	4
Mount Waverley Reserve	4
Victoria Police deaths	4
Sexual assault	4
Bonnie Doon Football Netball Club	5
Warburton Millgrove Football Netball Club	5
Southern United Hockey Club	5
Save the Dandenongs League	5
Energy policy	5
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund	6
Working from home	6
Violet Town Community House	6
Ian Hamill	6
Peter Bailey	6
Fitzroy Stars Football Club	7
Treaty	7
St Dominic's Primary School, Camberwell	7
Hawthorn Community Chest	7
Bring Your Bills	7
Camping regulation	8
Merri-bek Primary School	8
Brunswick City Soccer Club	8
Coburg Districts Football Club	8
Pascoe Vale Hadfield Cricket Club	9
Chaffey Secondary College	9
Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council	9
Robinvale skate park and playground	9
Birchip and Culgoa visit	9
Treaty	9
Kew future leaders speech competition	9
Ararat College	10
Ripon electorate schools	10
Frankston Dolphins	10
Geelong Youth Awards	11
Hallam Football Netball Club	11
R U OK? Day	11
Dau Akueng and Chol Achiek	11
Point Cook Youth Advisory Council	12

STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS

Environment and Planning Committee	12
Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works	12
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	13
Gambling and Liquor Regulation in Victoria: A Follow up of Three Auditor-General Reports	13
Environment and Planning Committee	14
Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works	14
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	15
Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates	15

CONTENTS

Environment and Planning Committee	16
Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply	16
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	17
Report on the 2023–24 Financial and Performance Outcomes	17
BILLS	
Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	18
Second reading	18
MEMBERS	
Minister for Transport Infrastructure	44
Absence	44
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Community safety	44
Ministers statements: housing	46
Community safety	46
Ministers statements: housing	47
Community safety	48
Ministers statements: housing	48
Youth crime	49
Ministers statements: rental reform	50
Community safety	51
Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel	53
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Bulleen electorate	54
Narre Warren South electorate	54
Gippsland East electorate	54
Thomastown electorate	54
Kew electorate	54
Kororoit electorate	55
Melbourne electorate	55
Broadmeadows electorate	55
Tareit electorate	55
BILLS	
Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	56
Second reading	56
MOTIONS	
Budget papers 2025–26	64
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE	
Housing	68
MOTIONS	
Budget 2025–26	91
ADJOURNMENT	
Retail workplace safety	103
Bass electorate community sport	103
Ovens Valley electorate small business	104
Lara electorate multicultural communities	104
Killara Road–Maroondah Highway, Coldstream	105
Virtual women’s health clinic	105
Fossil fuel advertising	106
Werribee electorate bus services	107
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund	107
Footscray Hospital	108
Responses	108

Wednesday 10 September 2025

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

Bills

Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Carlton (Recreation Ground) Land Act 1966, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, the Forests Act 1958, the Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020, the Heritage Rivers Act 1992, the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990, the National Parks Act 1975 and the St. Kilda Land Act 1965 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:35): May I request a brief explanation of the bill.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:35): The bill seeks to implement several government commitments in relation to public land, creating new parks in central-west Victoria and West Gippsland, as well as making a range of miscellaneous amendments to several land-related acts. The bill will also provide opportunities for seasonal recreational deer hunting by stalking in parts of the three new central-west national parks and the existing Errinundra and Snowy River national parks for East Gippsland. The bill will also support the granting of Aboriginal title over several parks in accordance with two recognition and settlement agreements under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 by creating Wandong Regional Park under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 and updating the plans defining the boundaries of several existing parks under the National Parks Act 1975.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

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

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 in relation to the Mental Health Tribunal, information sharing and other matters, to amend the Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 to abolish the forensic leave panel and to provide for the functions and powers of the Mental Health Tribunal under that act, to amend the Freedom of Information Act 1982 in relation to the Mental Health Tribunal, to amend the Health Services Act 1988 in relation to information sharing and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:37): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:37): This bill will transfer the functions of the Forensic Leave Panel to a new forensic division of the Mental Health Tribunal, ensure information-sharing provisions of the act operate as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and make

minor and technical amendments to ensure the act operates as intended. The amendments within the bill are necessary to respond to changing circumstances in the evolving mental health service system since the act's passage.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:37): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002, the Building Act 1993, the Environment Effects Act 1978, the Heritage Act 2017 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:38): I ask for further explanation of the bill.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:38): The purpose of this bill is to deliver a series of critical building and construction industry related amendments to the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 and the Building Act 1993. Amendments will implement many of the government's approvals of the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works. The bill will also introduce registration reforms for building surveyors and building inspectors to lift practitioner performance and boost workforce supply. Finally, the bill makes clarifying changes to the Environment Effects Act 1978, the Heritage Act 2017 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:39): General business, notice of motion 13 and orders of the day 10 to 12, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Notices given.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

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

Auditor-General – Responses to Performance Engagement Recommendations: Annual Status Update 2025 – Ordered to be published.

*Motions***Motions by leave**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for a complete lack of leadership and for remaining silent for two days after the brutal murder of two children and calls on the government to immediately provide police with the powers and resources to keep the community safe.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house acknowledges serious concerns about a series of actions that occurred in this chamber yesterday, 9 September, to silence the opposition from raising issues about Victoria's crime crisis and victims of crime, which ultimately silences the children, women and men who are victims of crime.

Leave refused.

*Rulings from the Chair***Unparliamentary language**

The SPEAKER (09:43): During question time on 28 August the Leader of the House took a point of order requesting that the member for Lowan withdraw a remark made in an interjection while the member was walking back to her seat and which the minister found personally offensive. I had not heard the remark and so asked the member if she had made such a comment. The member for Lowan said that she had not. I did not uphold the point of order at that time but committed to reviewing the footage of the chamber. The video-on-demand footage is inconclusive. As members would know, interjections when made away from the microphones or when the member does not have the call are often not picked up. Accordingly, I do not uphold the point of order.

However, I wish to make some remarks about personally offensive remarks. Sometimes the Chair may seek verification from a member as to whether they made an unparliamentary remark. The Chair cannot and does not hear everything, particularly in question time when the chamber is very loud or when members interject when not in their seat, which is in itself very disorderly. However, the Chair is not obliged to seek this verification and may simply direct the member to withdraw a remark. The Chair has this discretion. Even if the member does not think the remark was particularly unparliamentary or thinks that they have been misheard entirely, they are required to comply with the direction from the Chair.

I remind members that personally offensive remarks are by their nature subjective. There are various rulings from the Chair about where to draw that line, balancing members' freedom of speech with the need for respectful debate. Noting that subjectivity, there are some remarks that the Chair would almost always find unparliamentary, such as swearwords, personally disparaging remarks about someone's character or appearance rather than about their conduct or an allegation that a member is lying, has lied or will lie. I make the point that members interjecting while out of their seat, on or off the mic, are not helping the chamber and should not assume that the benefit of the doubt will be extended by the Chair.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Speaker, I raised a matter with you on the last sitting day of last week in regard to rude gestures and mockery made towards me by the member for Eureka during a condolence statement for the deceased policemen, one of whom was a family friend. I had a response from you, so I would appreciate an understanding as to your review and timeline.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warrandyte, I will be asking you to come and see me very shortly.

*Members statements***Health services**

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:46): Recently it has come to the attention of the local community that there will be another so-called voluntary amalgamation of hospitals in my part of the state. Casterton Memorial Hospital now appears to be coming under voluntary amalgamation with Western District Health Service. I ask the minister to put this to the Casterton community. Casterton hospital has been managed by the Western District Health Service CEO and governed by their board for a long period of time. Obviously, when it is voluntary it is the board that is making the decision, informed by the CEO, who is already in place. The Casterton community deserve to have their say on this merger. They deserve to be heard on this issue, and this has not occurred in this instance. I ask the minister to take this forward and listen to their community.

We do not want to see, with any mergers across the state's hospitals, what we have seen under Grampians Health. Under Grampians Health we have seen horrific cuts not just to health services and not just to local services but also to local jobs. We are seeing cuts to the laundry service, which is a really important employment opportunity for people who may be challenged in getting jobs elsewhere. There are people who have been working there for a long, long time who have lost their jobs. We are also hearing the kitchen is going to close. I have heard this multiple times this week from my office. I ask the minister to confirm that kitchen operations will continue at Wimmera Health Care Group, and also to offer further mental health support not just for our region but also for farmers in our community.

Mount Waverley Reserve

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:47): It has been a busy couple of weeks in Ashwood, as it always is, but I was very pleased to turn up at the opening of the new Mount Waverley Reserve pavilion with my federal colleague Dr Carina Garland, the member for Chisholm, our fantastic mayor of Monash, Paul Klisaris, and the Mount Waverley Blues footy club and Mount Waverley Cricket Club. This is a project that I got involved with very early on, actually before I was elected to this wonderful place. We made a commitment in 2018 as a government that should we be elected, which we were, we would have a master plan for the Mount Waverley Reserve. Lo and behold, we got elected and that happened. That master plan, with the assistance of our federal government – thank you to Carina for her excellent work – has turned a conversation with the former president of the Mount Waverley Blues, Stephen Pewtress, and the current president of Mount Waverley Cricket Club, David Grossman, into what has become a \$9 million fantastic redevelopment of the Mount Waverley Reserve. It was fantastic to be a part of it. I want to also note Chris Hale, the president of Mount Waverley Blues, who is doing a fantastic job there. The clubs are all excited. It is fantastic.

Victoria Police deaths

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:49): Two weeks ago Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim de Waart-Hottart lost their lives when they were gunned down at work. Both were dedicated officers who would rather be out catching crooks than completing paperwork behind a desk. Their deaths will leave a great impact on their family and friends, particularly their policing colleagues, many of whom are active in the search for the gunman.

Sexual assault

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:49): The ABS released statistics last week which revealed a disturbing trend. Incidents of sexual assault in Australia increased by 10 per cent from the previous year. Most alarming, though, is that this increase was 13 per cent in Victoria. That is an additional 805 victims, 87 per cent of whom were females. The offenders were known to the victims 69 per cent of the time. These are not just numbers; they represent lives shattered and families torn apart. We need to do more.

Bonnie Doon Football Netball Club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): The Bonnie Doon Football Netball Club are having another great year, with six out of seven teams making it to the finals. This is a phenomenal effort for a small town with a big heart. Bonnie Doon will be awash with red and black as the town get behind their heroes.

Warburton Millgrove Football Netball Club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): Warburton Millgrove netball A-grade team put on a stunning display at the semi-final. They have their sights now firmly set on the grand final, and we will all be cheering them on.

Southern United Hockey Club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): The Southern United Hockey Club have had another great year. Tonight the women's 35 South East are contesting the grand final, and on the weekend women's pennant B, D and E are in the grand final. Men's pennant C and the premier league on Sunday are looking to go back to back.

Save the Dandenongs League

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:50): Across the Dandenong Ranges and its foothills we love our local environment, and we have much to thank the Save the Dandenongs League, one of Victoria's oldest and most respected environmental groups, for ensuring that so much of it has been preserved for generations to come. Next month the SDL celebrates its 75th anniversary, and I rise to pay tribute to its extraordinary legacy.

Founded in October 1950 by Miss May Moon, Professor John Turner and Cr Eric Leane, SDL has been a cornerstone of environmental advocacy in our region. Their early efforts led to the establishment of the Karwarra Australian plant garden and the preservation of Birdsland Reserve, now a much-loved 75-hectare bushland sanctuary in Belgrave Heights. Much is owed to the late Betty Marsden, who served as president for an incredible 37 years. It was she who convinced Sherbrooke shire to purchase the land that became Birdsland, saving it from suburban development, and today it houses the Southern Dandenongs indigenous nursery and the Birdsland Environmental Education Centre and hosts the much-loved platypus festival. SDL's commitment to bushland preservation, wildlife protection and community engagement and education continues to inspire, and I commend and extend my deepest thanks to them for 75 years of tireless service to our environment and community.

I want to make special mention of the fabulous Monbulk Primary students Eliza, Em, Angus and Angus, along with teacher Meg and assistant Rhiannon, who last week took part in Nursery & Garden Industry Victoria's stunning display of all things horticulture in Queen's Hall. Their knowledge of and enthusiasm for green life means the future of horticulture is very bright indeed. It was also great to see Monbulk businesses there – Drewitts Bulbs and Warners, Fleming's and Biemond nurseries.

Energy policy

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:52): I wish to again bring the house's attention to the parlous state of the cost of living in the electorate of Polwarth. Residents and households right across Polwarth are suffering at the hands of what is clearly government-led inflation in the cost of energy. This winter, again, we have seen skyrocketing firewood prices, which is an essential form of heating in winter for households across Polwarth, as a direct result of the government's decision to no longer allow the forest firewood coupes that have been in existence for more than 100 years. We have seen new planning provisions banning the installation of gas appliances, which are adding thousands and thousands of dollars to the cost of new homes. Worse still, many streets in my electorate of Polwarth simply do not have the electrical capacity for homes to go all electric – another huge cost inflicted on

households that this government has refused to deal with. The cost of energy and the cost of living is really hurting Polwarth homes.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:53): Rates notices are out, and for the people of Polwarth, the three shires of Surf Coast, Colac Otway and Corangamite: your rate notices are out now and you only have two months to object to the rate valuations on there. Many people are reporting massive increases in their rates brought about essentially by the emergency services tax that has been forced on homes. Your house price directly affects the price of that. If you have a problem with it, get your objections in soon.

Working from home

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:53): The Allan Labor government is committed to making work fairer and more flexible for every Victorian. Over the past decade Victoria's economy has grown faster than any other state and is now 31 per cent larger than when Labor took government in 2014. Since June 2020 alone more than 113,000 new businesses have been created, an increase of 18 per cent – the largest growth of any state in the nation. The Allan Labor government's working from home consultation broke state records, with more than 18,400 Victorians already having had their say.

Not everyone has the option of working from home, but everyone benefits from a stronger, more productive economy. Over 14,000 Tarneit families stand to benefit from this reform. They are the ones who live the stress of endless commutes and the constant balancing act between their jobs and their caring responsibilities. This policy will put their wellbeing first. Giving people the choice to work from home means more time with family, less time in traffic and greater flexibility to support our local schools, businesses and community life. We know that those flexible working arrangements are paramount to Victorian workers and to Victorian businesses, and we will support the continued right for people to work from home.

Violet Town Community House

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:55): I recently had the pleasure of being the guest speaker at the Violet Town Community House beautiful women's health high tea led by the incredible and dynamic Lisa Jensen. With more than 40 inspiring local women in attendance, it was a day of honesty, connection and lifting each other up. A special thanks goes to Lorraine who guided us through some pelvic floor exercises before I shared the nitty gritty of political life with a young family in regional Victoria. Events like this remind us how important neighbourhood and community houses are. They are the heartbeat of our towns, delivering everything from food relief to exercise classes, occasional care, friendship, learning and a sense of belonging. Despite often limited resources, they continue to work tirelessly to support others, and our communities are stronger for it.

Ian Hamill

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:55): I also want to recognise Senior Constable Ian Hamill, who served 45 years in the force, including two and a half years in Violet Town. As Ian prepares for retirement, I want to thank him for his decades of service protecting Victorians and wish him all the very best for this well-earned retirement. Together we are creating a next-of-kin fridge magnet so first responders can quickly reach loved ones in an emergency.

Peter Bailey

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:56): Another shout-out is to Peter Bailey, who I caught up with at Comspread, to congratulate him on 40 years of service with the Goomalibee and Upotipotpon CFA fire brigade – say that quickly. He recently handed over the captain baton after 20 incredible years. Peter was awarded the National Emergency Medal in 2015 for his efforts during the 2009 bushfires and in 2022 for his – *(Time expired)*

Fitzroy Stars Football Club

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (09:56): In the inner north and across Victoria, First Peoples are making history. On Saturday the Fitzroy Stars won their first men's senior premiership since 1990. It was Eddie Betts on the ground with four goals, it was Allan Norris in his 200th game, it was Lionel Proctor finishing a lifetime of service with a premiership medal, and it was coach Neville Jetta and captain Kain Proctor leading their side to glory.

At the Stars' home on Sir Douglas Nicholls oval in Thornbury another milestone is rising. Our Labor government is supporting them to build an Aboriginal women and girls sport and wellness centre – the first of its kind in Australia. It will create a new home for the Fitzroy Stars women, with AFL-grade, female-friendly change rooms and dedicated spaces for health, education, training and social connection. Most of all it will be a place that supports Aboriginal women and girls to thrive. I want to acknowledge Aunty Esme Bamblett, president of the Fitzroy Stars, for her strong advocacy and vision in driving this project forward for the community.

Treaty

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (09:57): Yesterday in this Parliament history was made again with the introduction of the statewide treaty – the first in the nation. Treaty will establish Gellung Warl to give First Peoples a direct say in their services and initiatives. It will strengthen truth-telling beyond Yoorrook and embed our shared history in every Victorian school. From a premiership flag that lifts community pride, to a hub that empowers the next generation, to a treaty that reshapes our future, this is Victoria at its best. This is a historic moment. This is how we move forward together.

St Dominic's Primary School, Camberwell

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (09:58): Last week I had the great pleasure of visiting St Dominic's Primary School in Camberwell in my electorate. I was given a wonderful tour by four impressive student leaders Millie, Emily, James and Grace, who showed me through the classrooms and introduced me to their school community. We stopped in to see the preps, dropped in by an Italian lesson – a reminder to me that I do need to brush up on my Italian skills – and even met the school's much-loved pet lizards, Dom and Nick. I thank principal Natalie Kenny and her team for the very warm welcome, and I look forward to joining the community again at next year's Italian Festa, one of the great local social events on the Hawthorn calendar.

Hawthorn Community Chest

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (09:58): On Friday evening I was delighted to attend the Hawthorn Community Chest annual trivia night. Hawthorn Community Chest is one of the most esteemed local charities in Boroondara. As a proud patron of Hawthorn Community Chest, it is always inspiring to see our community come together to raise funds for those in need. Hawthorn Community Chest has been doing this since 1958 and has been serving the families and people of our area with compassion and dedication. Can I pay tribute to president David Gorton, the entire committee, my fellow patrons Lesley Gillespie OAM and Dr Monique Ryan, and all who contributed to another successful evening and who will contribute to further efforts. Their efforts continue a fine tradition of service that makes our community stronger.

Bring Your Bills

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (09:59): It was a pleasure to be joined by the Premier and the member for Cranbourne, who visited the Bring Your Bills event at Arthur Wren Hall in Hampton Park last week. We saw firsthand the impact that this initiative has on my electorate of Narre Warren South and surrounding areas. The fantastic event was organised by South East Community Links to provide easy access to organisations from financial legal utility, including private and government sectors, which delivered practical in-person advice, just simply helping people to navigate financial challenges on the spot. In light of recent attempts by others to divide and incite fear, the event displayed the very

best of Victoria. The room was filled with people from all walks of life and backgrounds and different faiths, cultures and languages, connected by a real sense of respect and care for one another.

A really big thankyou to Peter McNamara, who is the CEO of South East Community Links, and his incredible team for delivering this event, including the many volunteers from across the region who helped on the day as well. The impact was real. There were some 400 community members who attended, and \$3 million in debt was addressed and \$200,000 of debt was wiped from the day. I thank the Premier for attending and the community for their very warm welcome. Community is about caring for one another, and care and compassion will always outshine hate.

Camping regulation

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (10:01): Last year of course many people experienced the real, profound challenges that came from Australia's cost-of-living crisis. The Allan government responded with a whole raft of different cost-of-living measures, one of which was very important to our regional tourism economy, that being the free camping initiative. This initiative provided many families with the opportunity of taking up a family holiday that they otherwise may not have been able to fund. Not only was this important for those individual members and those families, but it was also important for underpinning small business and jobs in our tourism economies, particularly areas like the Grampians, like the Great Ocean Road and like the Gippsland Lakes. These are important parts to the Victorian economy. This free camping initiative I think helped families, it helped support jobs and it helped support small business, and I would very much encourage the Allan Labor government to again look at having this initiative in place for this upcoming summer season.

Merri-bek Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:02): I was very pleased to have welcomed the Merri-bek Primary School community to Parliament on 13 May to continue their advocacy efforts on their new concept, master plan and priorities and to meet with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll, the Parliamentary Secretary for Education the member for Albert Park and members of the Northern Metropolitan Region Enver Erdogan and Sheena Watt in the other place. Thanks to school leaders who attended and who did their school community very proud indeed in advocating for their priorities and future vision, including Maria Giordano, the principal; Sean Gander, school council president; Mark Evenhuis, building and grounds committee member; Joseph Hess, learning specialist; and Belinda Slomo, the business manager.

Brunswick City Soccer Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:03): I am also delighted to report that the 2025–26 budget also delivered \$200,000 towards new lights for Brunswick City Soccer Club at Dunstan Reserve's southern training pitches. It will allow for safer and longer evening training sessions, expand the game capacity and access for the club's growing number of women, girls and junior players. Commendations to Loui Kastanos, the president, and Lambros Tapinos, the former councillor. Go the Spartans.

Coburg Districts Football Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:03): Our previous \$1.25 million budget investment into Coburg Districts FC at Cole Reserve, Pascoe Vale, has also since delivered its first major stage of works, with new lights on its southern oval and more training and games for women and girls. Commendations to Allan Chandler, the president, Dean Leeds, the treasurer, and all the club's volunteers. We look forward to stage 2 of this project commencing very soon, with new drainage and oval resurfacing on the northern main oval.

Pascoe Vale Hadfield Cricket Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:04): A \$175,000 commitment to delivering new cricket nets at Pascoe Vale Hadfield Cricket Club is now being put to use. Construction has commenced, and the nets will be ready for the new cricket season. Thanks to Kelvin Thomson and Stephen Whitchurch.

Chaffey Secondary College

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:04): This past week has been a reminder of just how strong and proud our communities are across the Mildura electorate. At Chaffey college I joined staff and students for their NAIDOC ceremony, which was a moment of pride and reflection. Kehan and all the students spoke so, so well and should be incredibly proud.

Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:04): At SMECC, the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, I had the privilege of visiting their social supermarket, which is called Nourish Sunraysia. It is a place built not just on groceries on the shelves and produce but on dignity, where families can access affordable food, connect with services and feel supported through tough times. Well done to the board, Akesa, Mitch and the team of dedicated volunteers that run it.

Robinvale skate park and playground

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:04): In Robinvale the joy was unmistakeable as we had the official opening of the new skate park and playground. Seeing kids of all ages, including my own and my mate Iggy Jukes, who played a pivotal part in the community consultation process, was proof that when we invest in youth spaces we invest in healthier, safer and more connected towns.

Birchip and Culgoa visit

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:05): Further south, I visited community groups and local businesses in Birchip and Culgoa, where I met with local communities to talk about roads, small business and the future of farming in these stressful times. As I continue to say in this place, our farmers feed not just our region but the whole state, the whole country and the whole world, and they deserve to know they will be backed through the challenging times now and into the future. Across my electorate, our community needs to be heard.

Treaty

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:05): As Victorians, we should be very proud of the fact that we have now introduced to this place treaty with First Peoples – the first in this country. The fact that we will acknowledge 65,000 years of history and culture and begin to genuinely address closing the gap is so important to our community. I am looking forward to the debate during the next sitting, and we will have a lot more to say then. However, I do want to address the misinformation that this somehow relates to the federal referendum on the Voice – it does not. The Voice was about recognising First Nations people in the constitution. I also want to be clear that Victoria has been on this journey to treaty for almost 10 years, and this process has been available to anyone online and through the reports that we have given, which I think are now up to about five or six. So it has not been hidden, it has not been kept from the people of Victoria; it has been a very open process for the last 10 years. And the fact is that we have won three elections with this commitment to moving towards treaty. To say that it is all hidden and secret is a load of garbage. I would ask the opposition to reconsider their position on this important historical time that we are about to enter. I really do look forward to the debate.

Kew future leaders speech competition

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:07): I rise to congratulate the winners of the Kew future leaders speech competition. We held the final of the Kew future leaders speech competition in this very place last week, and it was terrific to see so many young people come into the chamber and present their views and their solutions for a stronger community, a stronger state and a stronger country. Can I congratulate

Harvey from Kew East Primary School for his incredibly witty speech about the importance of access to local amenity and activities for our young people in Kew. Harvey highlighted the fact that the Kew rec is a literal wreck, in his words, and the North East Link site is taking away local parklands and having an impact on our young people. Mihili, from Balwyn High, was the winner for the secondary school program, and she spoke so eloquently about the importance of young people being active citizens and participating in our democracy. Congratulations, Mihili, for your very, very thoughtful speech. Zane from Kew High was the runner-up in the secondary school competition for his very personal and impactful speech on racism and microaggressions and the need for us all as a community to call them out when we see them. And Jessica, the runner-up in the primary school competition, from St Anne's Primary spoke about road safety and particularly the roundabout on Belford Road in Kew and local students having access to safety. Thank you to all the students for their incredible, passionate speeches and for giving their voice to these issues, and to Anne Feehan for her contribution on the judging panel.

Ararat College

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:08): Last Tuesday I had the honour of joining the Minister for Education at Ararat College to celebrate the start of construction on the school's \$4.6 million redevelopment. The project will transform the high school, building brand new classrooms, toilets, locker bays, wellbeing spaces and staff workspaces. It will mean Ararat kids will no longer have to learn in classrooms that are boiling hot in summer and freezing cold in winter, and they will instead have the state-of-the-art school facilities that they deserve. This project is dear to my heart, having fought hard for it together with former principal Ellie McDougall. I want to thank all of those who joined us last week and those who helped get us to this point, including acting principal Jen Penn, assistant principals Emma Henry and Cameron Kimber, school captains Aylah Knight and Daemon Savoia, school council president Janine Adams and staff member extraordinaire Kevin Bowles. By term 3 next year students and staff at Ararat College will have new, modern classrooms and a better learning environment for years to come.

Ripon electorate schools

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:09): It was also a pleasure last Tuesday to join the Minister for Education at a round table at Amphitheatre with principals from rural schools across the Pyrenees and Northern Grampians shires. We had a great, candid conversation about the issues and needs faced by our region's tiniest schools, including their admin loads, transport needs, program goals and shared resourcing. I want to thank Mark McLay and Shane Mathison from Country Education Partnership for helping facilitate the chat and Louis Franc, Benjamin Gallagher, Emily Fithall, Matthew Smith, Cameron Carter and Kate Morecombe.

Frankston Dolphins

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:10): The Frankston Dolphins – what an amazing story, from losing their VFL licence to going into a semifinal in Southport, Queensland, this weekend. We won against Casey on Saturday, the first home final since 2006 – 4500 people through the gate at Kinetic Stadium, the first preliminary final we have participated in in 28 years and a very happy president in Steve Finocchiaro. We played our first final in 6944 days, and what a resurgence. To the president Steve, the board, the players, Bailey Lambert, Harrison, the coach Jackson Kornberg, Hipwell – they did an amazing job, and it was an absolute nailbiter. By half-time the amazing Dolphs were up by I think 42 or 46 points – what a game. For those who saw it, it was nailbiting. I had to go and pick up my son 15 minutes out from the end, so I was tuned in on the radio, and I can still see my fingernail marks in the steering wheel. It was an absolute belter of a game, and it is another great story for VFL and Victoria to have these standalone teams now playing in a final. For the community of Frankston and most of the Mornington Peninsula, I think, who turned out for this game, they saw an absolute belter. Good luck, Dolphins, this weekend. Go Dolphs!

Geelong Youth Awards

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:11): Last week I was delighted to attend the 2025 Geelong Youth Awards. These awards recognise and celebrate young people who are making significant contributions in our community. Huge congratulations to all those nominated. There were over 147 nominations this year across nine different categories. Congratulations to the winners: James Logan, who won the Active Achievement Award – and good luck to James when he competes in the Deaflympics in Tokyo later this year; James Herbert, who won the Arts and Music Award; Rezai Rehman, who won the Citizenship Award; Ruhaniat Parri Kaur, who won the Cultural Awareness Award; Alexander Serra and Ethan Vines, who both won the Innovation Award; Jesse Moore, who won the Inspiration Award; Mackenzie Sinclair, who won the Leadership Award; Nick Riordon, who won the Unsung Hero Award; Xavier Cunningham, who won the Volunteer Award; and Liam Hair, who won the Judges' Award. A recognition award went to Alexander Scott, an incredible 12-year-old who is turning his experience with bullying into a movement for change. Alex established Shoot for Kindness, Block Out Bullying, an awareness campaign to encourage everyone to be kind to one another.

I would like to finish with the words of Jesse Moore, an advocate for youth housing, mental health and the LGBTQIA+ community, who deservedly won the Inspiration Award. Jesse's strength and resilience are so inspiring. In their speech Jesse delivered a message to anyone who is struggling. They said, 'There is hope, there is change coming and there is a life waiting for you.' Thank you to Jesse and all these incredible young leaders for inspiring me and so many across our region.

Hallam Football Netball Club

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:13): Sport is important. It changes lives. It teaches us teamwork and brings people together. On the weekend I got to celebrate a very amazing sporting victory. The Hallam Hawks footy club started 25 years ago as a junior club and for the past 11 years has been a senior club, and for this whole time they have not won a premiership. We all know that winning is not everything; however, it is a very good feeling, and on the weekend the Hallam Hawks won their very first premiership. It was a much closer game than expected with Dandy West. However, they held on for a great victory, and not only did the seniors win but the reserves also came home with the cup, making it a double celebration.

Clubs do not exist on their own, and so I want to give a huge shout-out to the amazing president Jack and to Daniel, Adam, Mitchell, Tracey, Pete, Carmel and of course SJ, who makes over 80 meals for the team each week. I would also like to do a shout-out to the two captains, Joel of the seniors and Hayden in the reserves. And we cannot, of course, forget the coaches Tom and Michael. Congratulations to Zach, Anthony, Jack and Joel – all have been named in the southern league division 4 team of the year.

R U OK? Day

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:14): 11 September is R U OK? Day, a day we are reminded to look out for our mates, check in with our friends and ensure that they are all okay. A life lost to suicide is a life too many. My phone is always on, my door is always open and there is nothing too large we cannot solve. So on 11 September and every day, R U OK? A conversation can change a life.

Dau Akueng and Chol Achiek

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (10:14): I speak today with a heavy heart as our community mourns the loss of two young lives in Cobblebank on Saturday. This tragedy has deeply shaken our community, and on behalf of the electorates of Melton and Kororoit and the constituents which I represent and everyone here today, I extend my deepest condolences and support to the families, the loved ones, who are facing this unimaginable pain. No words can ease their suffering, but I want them to know that they are not alone and that the whole community stands with them in this time of sorrow. As I stand here today, I honour and cherish the memories of 12-year-old Chol and 15-year-old Dau.

Dau was a much loved and talented basketballer and was quite the young leader. Chol was known as a bright and funny young man who looked after everybody that he met. Their deaths have left a void that cannot be filled. But I want to make it known that we will not rest until justice is served. The authorities are actively investigating, and I have full faith that those responsible for this senseless act will be found and held accountable. Their families and loved ones will get the closure that they deserve. May both boys rest in peace.

Point Cook Youth Advisory Council

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:16): I want to acknowledge the Point Cook Youth Advisory Council, who are delivering their report tonight –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! We move to consideration of parliamentary committee reports.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Environment and Planning Committee

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

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (10:16): I rise this morning to make a contribution on 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 and a report that was tabled in 2023. I would like to, at the outset, acknowledge that committee for the fantastic work that it has done, and the chair, who is in the chamber, the member for Lara. There are other members of the committee, but I do not know who they are, so I will direct my gratitude to the member for Lara for undertaking this inquiry and producing what is an amazing report.

We have seen in the Victorian economy and the Victorian workforce, really in earnest over the last couple of decades, the rise in subcontractors being used, particularly in the construction industry. And I will note the member for Narracan, who has a fair bit of experience within this industry, made a contribution on this exact report some time ago and it was actually a really good contribution. What this rise in the use of subcontractors has done within the Victorian economy is it has created a new cohort of vulnerable workers, who not just do not get access to the entitlements that a full-time equivalent worker would get access to but are also really vulnerable in respect to receiving payments for the work that they have undertaken. We have seen in evidence in this inquiry – I have just seen it within the Victorian economy – situations where subcontractors are put onto 120- or 150-day payment terms, which obviously puts incredible pressure on that vulnerable worker and their family. But it has flow-on effects in the Victorian economy as well. These subcontractors are often required to provide their own materials, so they open an account at a local hardware store or at a local timber provider. Those accounts typically work on 30-day terms, and we have a situation where now this subcontractor does not get paid for their work for 120 days. So we have this flow-on effect where suppliers are also affected, the subcontractor is affected and their family are affected as well because it is hard to put food on the table when you do not get paid for 120 or 150 days but you have got to settle an account with your supplier. It creates a really difficult situation.

I will note this inquiry is fantastic and the report is fantastic. It is a real Labor sort of report. The recommendations are there to support vulnerable Victorian workers and indeed Victorian businesses, striking that balance I think really well. The government has now responded to the report, and I do know that there is legislation being introduced this week, so I will be very careful not to foreshadow debate on that.

Poor payment practices – as I said, long payment terms, late payments, incomplete payments and obviously non-payments – are experienced by businesses in many sectors of the Victorian economy. This is rife within the construction sector, and there are some examples of that – parliamentary privilege is a beautiful thing. Argyle Building Services was placed into administration in August 2024

after racking up over \$1.47 million to 55 creditors, a lot of which were subcontractors that had not received payment for the work they had undertaken.

This was an incredibly important inquiry. It was an absolutely fantastic report produced by the member for Lara, and I congratulate her on that. I look forward to debating the legislation that is being introduced this week as well.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:21): I rise to speak to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report. First of all, I will just say thank you to the member for Tarneit. I will give thanks where thanks are due. The member for Lara is actually the chair of my committee, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

Dylan Wight: Sorry.

Nicole WERNER: That is all right. The chair that you speak to is actually from the Environment and Planning Committee. The chair is the member for Wendouree, and I will have you know that the member for Wendouree and I did not go to school together per se but we are from the same school. I like to tell people in her electorate that we went to school together. We both went to Presbyterian Ladies' College in Burwood East. Anyway, credit where credit is due. The chair that I now work with – because I originally hailed from the Environment and Planning Committee, and I know so because that was actually the first inquiry I was part of a report for when I was first elected to Parliament. So there you go.

Anyway, the report that I am speaking about is from the inquiry into gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria: a follow up of three Auditor-General reports, specifically subsection 3.6.1, as it relates to well-regulated bars and pubs. I could think of one such in my electorate, and that is the Grand, Warrandyte, who I would love to give a big shout-out to, as they just celebrated their 130th birthday. How incredible is that. It is an institution and an icon in our community, from Friday night drinks with your friends to first birthday parties, to Sunday live music sessions and to community group functions. It is the place to be. To general manager Peter Appleby and his team: I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are a champion in our community. Peter is one of those people that everybody knows in the community. If you know Warrandyte, where it is a township and everyone knows everyone, there are these community legends that do so much for our area, and Peter is one of those people. He goes above and beyond to serve the community, and he has been at the helm of transforming this pub that gives back to our community, that sponsors all our local sports clubs and that is always thinking about how it can help serve. They are just a wonderful, wonderful group that work at the Grand.

As many will know locally, it was a group of locals who chipped in to save this local treasure in 2012. It was thanks to their vision and commitment that it has since thrived. I thank Greg Kennedy, Matthew Graham and Stephen Graham for your vision. We are all the better for it. As I said, the Grand has not only survived but thrived, becoming one of Victoria's most awarded venues. Their accolades include being named Overall Hotel of the Year in metro Victoria as a state finalist four years running from 2021 to 2025, and Outstanding Community Service and Achievement national winner in 2024. They have been twice recognised as the Heart of the Community state winner. They won Triple M's best pub in 2024, and they have won award after award.

I went and presented them with the certificate on behalf of the Victorian Parliament to say thank you for 130 years of service, and there was just not any space to hang it on their walls because they have that many awards to their name. So a big shout-out to them as they celebrate this weekend 130 years – wonderful.

I continue to speak to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on its inquiry into gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria, particularly chapter 3.6.1. As I mentioned, this report

highlights how important these venues are to our communities, which includes local footy clubs, many of which rely on licensed facilities to fund grassroots sport and bring people together. On that note, I want to congratulate local Tom Ryan on his extraordinary achievement, at 97 years of age, of 54 years of service as the timekeeper for Donvale Football Club. He has officially called time on a remarkable volunteering career that has spanned generations of players, coaches, supporters and families. Tom has been an incredible volunteer for the Donvale footy club, with over 11,000 games under his belt – that is incredible – and 72 years in local footy. And – get this – in 50 years he has not missed one single game. There is even a sign on the timekeepers' room at the Donvale footy club in Tom's honour. I want to give you a big shout-out today, Tom. Thank you for your years of service. Thank you for all that you have done for our community.

Environment and Planning Committee

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

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:26): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's report on its inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works. Unfortunately I can take no credit for this report, as the member for Warrandyte pointed out, but I would like to thank the chair, the member for Wendouree; the deputy chair, the member for Morwell; along with committee members and the secretariat for their hard work in conducting this inquiry and compiling this report. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who attended hearings or made a submission to this inquiry. Everyone in this place who works on committees understands the importance of having a thorough evidence base and the value of lived experience when we are working on inquiries such as this that impact real people. So to everyone who made a submission about their own experiences of poor payment practices within this sector, I thank you.

Across the state we know that the cost-of-living pressures are increasingly falling on our constituents, their families and wider communities, and in this place we hold the power to strengthen protections for workers to be paid on time and appropriately, to feed their families and to pay their bills on time. In fact this morning we saw legislation introduced: the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Bill 2025 I have not had an opportunity to look at this legislation yet, but I look forward to reading it over the coming weeks and making a contribution in this place. I am sure my colleagues on this side of the house are also looking forward to making contributions on it in the coming weeks.

Unfortunately late payment and non-payment of subcontractors are recurring issues within the construction industry, an important industry that we all know keeps Victoria running. This inquiry found that poor payment practices are all too common within construction, with subcontractors experiencing non-payment, late payment, incomplete payment or long payment terms, and our most vulnerable workers within the industry are bearing the brunt force of this. Sadly, migrant workers are at high risk of exposure to poor payment practices as they make up a significant portion of finishing trades such as plastering, painting and tiling. As such, these workers are more susceptible to late payment or protracted payment terms as the final employees within the hierarchy to be paid for their contributions.

Notably the inquiry found that a major contributor to poor payment practice lies within the hierarchical nature of the industry, with agencies and developers at the top. They then engage with head contractors, who then engage subcontractors. Payment flows down this structure, but it can be delayed at any level if administrative issues arise or when funds are misused or repurposed by other businesses. These funds that are earmarked for the payment of subcontractors are often put towards other business operations or projects. Concerningly, contractors at the head of the supply chain have superior bargaining power in awarding contracts, which means that they have the power to dictate unfavourable terms or make late payments to their subcontractors. We need to further protect our subcontractors,

who are too often overlooked at the end of the supply chain, to mitigate these poor practices and protect construction workers at every level.

What this inquiry has found is that national harmonisation and uniformity of payment security laws is essential for construction businesses to operate fairly across all jurisdictions – yet the most recent legislation is from 2002.

This legislation, the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002, provides subcontractors with the right to claim regular payments for their work and establishes an adjudication process to resolve payment disputes quickly. But as I said, this act is over 20 years old and should be updated to ensure that workers and subcontractors are accurately represented in the work that they are doing now in the current economy. I am so pleased that we are doing that by just this morning introducing legislation that will see rights for subcontractors protected and strengthened.

Importantly, this inquiry recommended strengthening the statutory right to claim payment through legislative reform. I would like to commend the committee on the strong recommendations that they have made, starting with their recommendation on reviewing construction best practice behaviours and engaging in consultation with stakeholders to inform future procurement practices within the industry. These are excellent and strong recommendations. I look forward to seeing the work progress beyond the inquiry. I congratulate the minister for introducing legislation this morning, and I am looking forward to making a contribution on this legislation, as I know my colleagues on this side of the house will also be in the coming weeks.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:31): I want to talk about public land management today, and my reference is page 145 of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report 2023–24. I want to cover off on a couple of areas. The first one is around invasive and pest plant and animal controls and the reduction that we have had in that. I cite the recent cutbacks to the department of agriculture staff, who deal very, very specifically in this place. What we are seeing generally across the board is a reduction in effort. In my electorate alone we have got wild dogs killing sheep, we have got sambar deer in incredible numbers in the bush and we have got an increasing feral pig population that is now bordering on coming through the national parks to the north of the electorate to the interface of farmland and starting to impact there. We have got foxes in the plant area. We have got African lovegrass out of control. Blackberries are everywhere – you can see them on the roadsides now, as thick as you can get – and English broom. The problems are enormous, and what we are seeing from this government is a lack of investment in the programs to control those species.

The one thing we should not be doing is taking our foot off the pedal in relation to that. I was up at the Moogji Aboriginal Council just last week having a discussion with them. Their works crews that work in the field are now having their hours and their jobs reduced; the contracts are not coming through for them to be able to keep doing the job that they were doing. It all boils down to: why are we seeing these reductions in all these areas in relation to invasive plants and animal species? And the bottom line is finances. We are not investing enough because we have a state budget debt that is heading to \$192 billion – \$1.2 million an hour in interest. And we are wondering why we are seeing cutbacks in these programs on the ground. It is just not good enough.

I want to also talk about the external contractors who have been employed by governments of both persuasions to maintain our bush tracks and prepare for fire season and the like. They are simply not getting the work that they used to get. The bottom line is that we are not as well prepared as we should be with summer coming. When we had the harvest and haulage contractors at the end of the timber industry transition into government contracts, we were told this panel of contractors would not be impacted and the same level of work would be maintained by them. We are not seeing that happen.

The work is simply not there. They are not getting anywhere near the level of work that they were before. Again, there is a lack of effort to maintain our bush; active bush management is again suffering.

The third area that I want to touch on while I am talking is firewood supply. We have recently had the firewood season open, and we have had coupes made available. Already, just a couple of weeks in, there is no firewood available in those coupes for people to go and collect.

We wrote to the minister on this last year, and the answer that we got back was that firewood is a limited resource with unpredictable availability. That was an answer to a question on notice: ‘firewood is a limited resource with unpredictable availability’. Let me tell you, the one thing we are not going to run out of in East Gippsland is firewood. Our bush is full of fuel; the fuel loads are at an enormous high. The problem is the government closed the timber industry, a major supplier of firewood, but did not plan for what would follow, and we now have firewood being imported from interstate to meet the need. It is government policy that has impeded the supply of firewood; it is not a lack of resource, I can assure you. I will take anyone in this chamber for a drive: there is resource everywhere. The bush is littered with debris that people could be using for their heating and their cooking in their homes. We need to address the massive fuel loads. We need to provide firewood. You would think the solution would be pretty simple, wouldn’t you: allow people access to those fuel loads that are going to cause a problem in the bush this summer, and let them use some of that resource for firewood. I urge the minister to change his policy, change his stance and allow for that to happen.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:36): Today I rise to talk about the parliamentary inquiry into securing Victoria’s food supply. This inquiry was conducted by the Legislative Assembly’s Environment and Planning Committee, with the final report handed down last November and the Victorian government response published on 31 July. I was a part of this inquiry alongside the hardworking members for Wendouree, Morwell, Bass, Monbulk, Croydon and Warrandyte. Together we travelled our great state, hearing from farmers, town planners, public servants and members of the public about this important topic.

Our terms of reference were to explore how best to secure the Victorian food supply in the context of urban sprawl and the impact of population growth on the farming industry and arable land. We heard of the challenges farmers are facing as our population rapidly grows and our greenfield developments encroach on arable land and of how the expansion of our cities and towns is undermining the viability of agriculture, with fragmented farmland and a food supply at risk. Some of our key findings include that Victoria’s population is projected to exceed 10 million people by 2051, increasing demand for fresh produce and placing pressure on farmland near cities. Peri-urban agriculture is critical to food supply but is increasingly threatened by development, land fragmentation and rising property prices. Farming communities face conflict due to proximity to residential developments, including complaints about noise, odours and farming practices, and food grown near cities is more vulnerable to disruption, making resilience a key concern.

Our final report made 33 key recommendations to ensure our state’s food supply is secured into the future through a whole-of-government whole-of-food-system response. Recommendations include to develop a statewide food system strategy to secure long term supply and resilience; strengthen planning controls to protect all farmland, including in Melbourne’s green wedges; introduce agricultural covenants to preserve farmland from inappropriate development; support peri-urban agriculture through targeted programs and infrastructure investment; promote regenerative and agroecological farming to enhance sustainability; foster diverse and decentralised supply chains to improve resilience; expand community food initiatives, including urban agriculture and local government food strategies; invest in farm technology and smart farms and grow the agricultural workforce; and address rate rises and improve access to farmland for new and small-scale farmers.

Two recommendations are particularly dear to my heart and relevant to the people of Ripon. They include recommendation 7:

That the Victorian Government amend the Victorian planning framework to require local government planning approval to build a small second dwelling on a residential property within the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone.

And recommendation 27:

That Agriculture Victoria work with the Victorian Farmers Federation, PrimeSafe and commercial abattoirs to negotiate small livestock producers' ongoing access to kill facilities in the short-to-medium term.

...

The Victorian Government support small scale livestock producers to establish micro-abattoirs (including mobile micro-abattoirs) in communities which can demonstrate a need for this critical shared agricultural infrastructure.

I am regularly contacted by those within farming zones, rural activity zones or rural conservation zones in Ripon that desperately want to build a second dwelling on their properties for the purposes of tourism, accommodation or worker housing.

This is particularly felt in the Pyrenees shire, where wineries want to boost their offering by building accommodation onsite but have not been able to do so due to zoning restrictions. It is also a really big issue for farmers across Ripon who want to build accommodation on their properties for shearers and farmhands, especially during harvest, but again are not able to by local government due to zoning restrictions.

Recommendation 27 was also particularly apt considering the decision by Hardwicks abattoir in Kyneton earlier this year to cease taking small meat processing orders. This decision sent shockwaves across Ripon and beyond for small-scale livestock farmers and butchers, who lost their access to service kill facilities. The report's recommendations to enable the growth of mobile and micro abattoirs on farms was welcomed by these groups, as well as by the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, who have been advocating for this outcome for many years. I was proud to see the Victorian government's response fully support recommendation 27, but better yet, the Minister for Planning and Minister for Agriculture recently announced an amendment to the Victorian planning provisions to make it easier to establish micro abattoirs where they are needed most. Under the amendment, micro abattoirs will no longer require a permit, making it faster and easier for projects to get off the ground and operate if they meet regulatory requirements. This is a huge win and an example of how parliamentary inquiries and their final reports can make a real practical difference across our state.

I want to thank all of those involved in this inquiry and our incredible secretariat for delivering a great result. I want to thank also everyone who signed our petition about micro abattoirs across the state.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Financial and Performance Outcomes

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:41): I rise to speak this morning on the 2023–24 performance measures by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. We see in its report a range of recommendations, and the recommendations all speak of a common theme, a lack of scrutiny and accountability in performance measures. It is so important. Whether it is the Department of Health, which the committee pointed out, needing to report more on the outcomes of its programs; whether it is in education, including the rolling out of building projects across the portfolio with schools in such dire need of upgrades; whether it is police in the youth justice space or the youth crime prevention space, the committee makes recommendations that we need to see better reporting. Even in relation to the Suburban Rail Loop and the Department of Transport and Planning, it makes recommendations about updated costings on the SRL.

I want to highlight this theme this morning because at the heart of every controversy, every financial stuff-up that we have had to address in recent years lies an absence of accountability and scrutiny. The

same thing happened with the Commonwealth Games. There was a lack of scrutiny. In fact the budget papers for 2024–25 actually failed to mention that before those budget papers were published the government had met secretly to uplift the cost estimates for the Commonwealth Games from \$2.5 billion to \$3.5 billion. That was not mentioned in the budget. It is what has happened in relation to major projects, where we have seen blowout after blow out, well over \$50 billion in blow outs that cannot be accounted for merely by scope changes and construction inflation – just complete mismanagement by the government of major projects.

This theme is very important, and it is why last year the coalition released a policy on improving accountability and scrutiny in budget reporting. You cannot get better outcomes in the absence of visibility and scrutiny. If you do not have that, governments will always slide off the road, which is what has happened here. If you look at what we have seen over recent years in terms of trends, we have seen Treasurer's advances, which are a very secretive way of dealing with poor planning, used for core business. They went from about \$300 million in the last year of the Napthine government to over \$12 billion in 2023. The contingency funds across the asset program and also outputs are in this year's budget over \$65 billion. That means that decisions have been made in relation to around about \$65 billion of projects. We do not see it. It is all buried in contingency, and we need better outcomes there.

We see in budget reporting today the continued use in the last two years in relation to the biggest project this state has ever undertaken in the Suburban Rail Loop of 'TBC', even in the face of the government saying it has signed contracts for the SRL, and we know that that is about \$7 billion today. But if the Premier and the then minister for infrastructure projects are to be believed, all contracts for SRL East will be signed before the next election.

Why doesn't that appear? Why doesn't the \$7 billion appear in this year's budget papers?

The Victorian Auditor-General released a report earlier this year on major projects performance reporting, and it made the startling finding that budget paper 4 cannot be relied upon. On the cost estimates the government has provided in budget paper 4 for major projects – bearing in mind we have about \$220 billion of projects on the go at the moment, new and existing projects – it said the estimates were 'not reliable, meaningful or comprehensive' – VAGO's words, not mine.

I return to the point I opened with: scrutiny, accountability and transparency are vital if Victoria is to get out of the financial mess we are in. What this report highlights is that there is a continued failure by this government across outputs and the asset program to actually account to the Victorian people for the way their funds are being spent.

Bills

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:46): I am delighted to rise and speak on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. May I say from the outset that the Liberal–Nationals will not be opposing this bill, and there are many reasons for that, which we will cover off on as we go through the lead speech.

First, I want to touch on some background. Crown Casino's history has been well documented, and as Victoria's largest single private employer we have great respect for the commitment Crown has made to Victoria. It is the entertainment centrepiece, and yes, it provides opportunities to gamble, but it would be very short sighted if you did not see Crown as more of a food and dining experience and entertainment complex than a place for people to lose money on the pokies at the tables. Gambling is

a legitimate pastime in Victoria, and as always, it is important to ensure that for those with a gambling addiction or problem the checks and balances are there as a safety net. Remember, the safety net is for the families as well as the players. Having said that, there are no excuses for Crown's behaviour that saw a royal commission and the punishments that were set out. I will not be reprosecuting this today, but I will say the punishments were justified and that Crown is complying with those recommendations.

The bill covers a few areas, which I will cover off on. One, it is about extending the timeframe for Crown to achieve the compliance that was demanded by Ray Finkelstein, and Crown intended to honour these recommendations and actions. It has become apparent that technology constraints and time barriers are making this transition very difficult, and the physical hardware of carded play on blackjack tables and carded play on roulette tables is still months away from a complete rollout. So we are still months away from this rollout and a trial. People might understand from the EGMs of poker machines that Crown already have carded play. You cannot play a pokie without a card that goes in and says how much you have spent and your history, and that is really important. The consoles, when you can sit down at one of those small consoles and play blackjack or roulette – it is very easy – are done as well; carded play has been adopted there. Where the difficulty is is in the roulette tables, the blackjack tables: you need to have a whole new set of chips; you need to have tables that are now designed purely for that purpose of being able to put your card in and play blackjack or roulette with a dealer or with a croupier. That technology is just lagging behind at the moment, and that is why they are calling for this two-year extension. Again, they are not trying to get off the hook here; they are just trying to extend the opportunity to make sure that when they get this compliance they get it right.

If you need any proof of the time for transition that Crown has gone through – pre COVID, if you did not see a specialist in a month's time, you were pretty disappointed, and now, post COVID, if you see a specialist inside of three months, you think it is pretty good.

This is the same thing that happens in the manufacturing industry. There is only one industry that does these specific tables, and Crown are working to make sure they get there and get the compliance right. That is the bulk of what this bill is about – it is to get that extension from 1 December this year to 1 December 2027.

The ramifications are pretty high, and I will go through those in a moment. Well, actually, I will go through them now. The alternative for Crown is not logical. Option 1 is to shut down their roulette tables and their blackjack tables, and that will cost 1000 jobs. Giving 1000 people their marching orders prior to Christmas is not a great thing for anyone. There is a cost-of-living crisis in Victoria at the moment, and the last thing anybody wants to see is 1000 people losing their job with the biggest employer in Victoria. This is not about changing the rules and letting them off the hook, it is about extending the deadline so Crown can do the compliance that they want to do.

The other option is for Crown to take a chance, and that is to get their croupiers and their dealers to make sure that they get all the details from people before they actually play at a blackjack table or a roulette table. That is very risky. There is always the chance of human error, and that is a \$100 million fine. Now, Deputy Speaker, I do not know how you would go with a \$100 million fine, but I do not think there are too many businesses in Victoria that would be able to face that. That is why Crown, not in a threatening manner, have just said, 'This is what we have to do if we can't get this extension, due to the technology shortfalls at the moment.' I am not saying it is not there, it just has not been rolled out in a timely way. The trial needs to take place, and that is what this extra two years is all about.

As I say, if the bill is not passed, Crown will need to close down all its traditional tables. I mean, you would still have your poker machines, your EGMs and your consoles, but you would have no atmosphere without the other activities that they have there with blackjack, and I think that would be a real test for what is Victoria's largest entertainment complex, moving into the summer. That is the pain we do not want to risk. With the cost-of-living crisis at the moment, we want to make sure that

our city is vibrant, and Crown is the centrepiece of that entertainment in Melbourne. This is about extending it; it is not changing the rules, it is just pushing it down the road a bit further so that we get this compliance right. At no point am I suggesting that Crown should not follow the recommendations of the royal commission, nor am I suggesting that any of these recommendations get watered down. But extending the timeframe to achieve better outcomes is plain common sense. This is not letting them off the hook; it is ensuring job security for many and that Melbourne's biggest entertainment complex will stay in full swing over the coming summer. The tourist dollar is very, very important. We have lost a lot of the tourist dollar in places. I know cruise ships are one example, and there are other examples that show that we have lost the tourist dollar, and here is a critical point where we do not want to lose that tourist dollar when people come to Melbourne and Crown Casino.

I also want to recap the Melbourne transformation plan that was formulated as a result of the royal commission. The Melbourne transformation plan formally initiated in December 2023 is a comprehensive multiyear reform and redevelopment strategy mandated by the VGCCC, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. Its key aim is to redesign Crown Melbourne into a safer, more culturally vibrant and globally competitive, integrated resort. Those key objectives are to enhance player safety and responsible gambling with embedded, ethical, lawful, culturally responsible operations. They aim to support staff with improved compliance frameworks and training.

In terms of regulatory oversight and reporting mechanisms, in April 2024 the VGCCC issued a statutory direction requiring Crown to implement the Melbourne transformation plan and regularly report on its progress. It is to include status reports and quarterly updates on progress, funding, staffing, audits and how reforms reduce gambling harm, with public status reports and more accessible summaries for the public issued every six months. Crown published its second public status report in early 2025.

The VGCCC has strengthened enforcement powers, and penalties now can reach up to \$100 million, which I said before. That is a significant breach. Nobody is prepared to take that risk, and Crown is included in that.

As part of the Melbourne transformation plan, there were key reforms and initiatives, including responsible gambling and harm minimisation; mandatory carded play on electronic gaming with identity verification, which is already in place, as I said; precommitment systems, including enforced breaks – a 15-minute rest after 3 hours, a 2-hour break after 12 hours play and other limits per weekly duration; and certainly removing continuous play features and placing cash limits of \$1000 per 24-hour period. The transformation plan included governance and culture; the establishment of a transformation steering committee, a dedicated program office and senior leadership accountability for each workstream, external oversight via independent verifications, financial audits and substantive board management.

Crown have made significant changes, to their credit, on the retail, dining and entertainment redevelopment side of things, with the closure of Rosetta, the Italian fine dining, replaced by the Henley, a bar highlighting local produce and casual ambience, late in 2024. There are plans to revitalise the Southbank precinct with river walk upgrades, retail dining and public activations, drawing on a Las Vegas style integrated resource model, and proposed conversions of the fireball pylons into large LED screens to display events. So Crown really are doing their bit to oblige the recommendations of the royal commission but at the same time changing their whole culture and certainly changing the way we see Crown, not as a gambling venue as such but as an entertainment venue with food and fine dining. As far as technology and tourism ambitions go, Crown has made a \$52 million investment in IT upgrades in 2025 across Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, including HR, payroll, rostering systems and mobile enhancements. There is a broader vision by Crown's leadership to reposition Crown Melbourne as a global tourism icon comparable to Singapore's Marina Bay Sands or Las Vegas resorts.

To summarise the Melbourne transformation plan, the Melbourne plan represents a holistic commitment to regulatory operation, cultural and structural, to redefine Crown Melbourne. It balances enhanced safety and compliance with expansive upgrades in entertainment, dining and guest experience, all under rigorous oversight. The royal commission has certainly changed the way Crown looks and feels and operates, and they certainly are significant wholesale changes.

Touching on the bill, clause 1 – probably the most significant one – touches on what I said before. It sets out the main purposes of the bill, which are to amend the Casino Control Act 1991 in relation to corporate associates, disciplinary action, player activity statements, cashless gaming and carded play, to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 in relation to club gaming machine entitlements and to make minor technical amendments. That is clause 1, which is the guts of what we are talking about today.

Clause 3 includes new definitions of ‘corporate associate’ and ‘fully automated table game’ versus traditional table games, ‘semi-automated table game’ and ‘traditional table game’. These definitions help to understand the new dawn of Crown gambling, which helps to reduce money laundering. Clause 4 explains the difference between associates and corporate associates and the rules around the 5 per cent or more interest in the casino operator. Clause 5 is the clause that ensures that Crown are not getting off the hook lightly. For anyone who thinks Crown has gotten off lightly, if this bill succeeds through both houses, let us be clear: clause 5 suggests that if Crown fails in its duty of this new modified transition plan, Crown is now liable for fines of up to \$1 million a day.

Gone is the \$100 million fine. But we have got a \$1 million fine per day, which would add up very quickly. And this has come from \$10,000 per day, so this is not a gentle prod to Crown Casino saying, ‘Okay, we will allow you this extra time, this extra two years, to get things in order.’ This is not a gentle prod; this is: ‘If you do not get it right, this is a massive stick.’ It is a \$1 million fine per day to say, ‘You’d better get it right or it’s going to get very expensive very quickly.’ Clause 8 makes it very clear that all associates must notify the commission in writing of a relevant change. That is common sense.

Now I want to touch on mandatory carded play on table games, clause 13 – amendments to section 71A postpone mandatory carded play requirements. Crown will implement the mandatory carded play on all electronic table games by 25 September. Those are the ones I have told you about, the consoles, the poker machines and the EGMs, as the technology infrastructure is fully developed and available – for clarity, that is blackjack, roulette, et cetera – on electronic consoles. Crown has requested an extension on traditional gaming table requirements till 1 December 2027 for the reasons that I have spoken about earlier, mainly through the lack of technology. These are world-first reforms and so the technology is not yet fully available to transition all traditional game types at Crown Melbourne to accommodate this plan. As I say, you have got to change the chips and you have got to have tables that people can now insert their mandatory card in at a blackjack table or at roulette. So there is a process, and there is more technology that is still rolling out as we speak and that is why that extension is required.

Crown are actively working with providers. There are also challenges associated with securing delivery of the necessary hardware due to the providers’ limited output capability, because there is only one manufacturer that can do this job. So there is a lot of pressure on to try and get their hands on these tables to comply with the royal commission. And as I say, this is a world-first, so it is important that we get that right. The technology is available for baccarat, and I know Crown intends to begin a phased transition to full compliance across the casino by 1 December 2027. That is what this bill is seeking, as we know.

On the impact of a manual approach, to put you in the picture, the potential manual operation controls – that would be the best endeavours of the croupier or the dealer. If it goes wrong, if it goes pear-shaped, that is a \$100 million fine currently and that is a risk Crown is not prepared to take. There would be further detrimental impacts to player experience, massive financial exposure and a great risk

to the casino. And as I say, it is a risk; although we call it the casino, which it is, it is also the entertainment mecca of Melbourne. It is the primary entertainment aspect of Melbourne, and we need to protect that.

Clause 14 amends to section 71C offences related to mandatory carded play. Clause 14 provides a new offence which prohibits Crown from knowingly or recklessly allowing a person to play a traditional table game other than by use of a player card. This ensures that discretion is applied to Crown's implementation on the traditional games. Only the subsequent penalties are for noncompliance, because there remains the possibility of human error, and that does not exist on electronic table games and electronic gaming machines.

So that is a summary of the bill that relates to the carded play on traditional tables. Let us not forget that Crown have complied with the carded play for EGMs, and it is fair to say that the rest of the electronic gaming industry are not thrilled that this occurred – because they are now going through the process of a trial – and that carded play may or may not come into all pubs and clubs in Victoria. I can tell you firsthand that pubs and clubs in Victoria are not thrilled with what Crown did, which required the royal commission, because now it is putting a bit of pressure on those as well outside of Crown Casino and it is affecting pubs and clubs in such a way that they do not believe that they deserve to be in that position. But now we are finding it is rolling out to pubs and clubs and Crown is taking it on the chin, but at the same time pubs and clubs are now having to see how this trial rolls out and to wait with bated breath to see whether they too will have to go to carded play in all their EGMs throughout all of Victoria.

I also note the bill raises the maximum number of gaming machines an entitlement operator can hold. This is just clubs. If we think about EGMs, or poker machines, as it is easier to call them, within the club sector – not the pubs, not Crown, just the clubs – an operator can hold up to 840 EGM licences. This bill will extend that from 840 to 1260. The good side of this, the important part to this side of it, is that all of us in this place will have small clubs in our communities and in our electorates that signed up to a deal that was not so great. It is a 20-year deal for these EGM licences that they signed up to. The rules got changed. I will not go into that, but what was going to be a better deal is not a great deal for all of them at the moment. Some of them want to get out of their licences. Some of them say, 'I've only got 20 poker machines. We're losing money hand over fist. How do I get rid of them?' Well, they cannot. They have signed up to a deal for 20 years.

Other clubs and other venue operators would take on some of those machines because it suits their business structure, their business model, but they cannot because they are already at the maximum. Increasing this maximum allows some of the larger operators to be able to take on those licences and actually help some of our smaller clubs get off the hook on a licence they really do not want anymore when they are happy to move out of the gaming space. I think that is a great assistance to our smaller clubs or any club who decides they want to get out of the gaming scene and the poker machine scene for whatever reason, whether it is moral, ethical or profit driven. Whatever the reason, if they want to get out of the EGM scheme – the poker machines – they should be able to do that. This is not the silver bullet, but it certainly helps some of those clubs to be able to do that. This change primarily benefits, as I say, the small clubs to help them get out of this if they like. After review by various stakeholders no objections were raised to this reform, and we are certainly not opposing that change. I think it is a good step forward, allowing that to happen. I also want to point out that for the clubs in this space the total EGMs allowable per operator, at 840, was 6 per cent. Going from 840 up to 1260 now makes it 10 per cent. Now, let us keep that in perspective with the pub space. In pubs operators can have up to 35 per cent, so we are still a long way from where the pubs are. This is a significant improvement for clubs, so that is where we stand on that.

Clause 20 amends section 3.2A of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to substitute the number '1260' for the number '840'. The effect of this amendment is that the number of club gaming machine entitlements that a venue operator may hold is increased from 840 to 1260 – and likewise, the sum of club gaming machine entitlements held by the entitlement holder and those that are held by one or

more entitlement holders. So clause 20 touches on what I have just spoken about – that increase for clubs. Again, both clubs and pubs and their bodies, Australian Hotels Association (AHA) and Community Clubs Victoria, support that change as well.

Going back to clause 10 for a moment, which amends section 64A to postpone cashless gaming requirements, Crown has requested an extension of the \$1000 cash limit for two years. This goes hand in glove with the gaming machines to make sure this technology all plays out rightfully and the compliance is in order. That is why the cashless gaming requirement change goes hand in glove. They certainly want to make sure that is extended by two years as well to ensure that compliance comes together as it should. There is still a significant change in patron behaviour required to comply with the reforms, the \$1000 limits set to come into effect in December this year, which requires considerable operational resources.

Clause 12 allows for Crown to introduce external funding requirements, which will give patrons the ability to use the Crown wallet to externally transfer funds in and out of their account using a debit card.

I want to be clear: this is debit card only, not credit card, obviously, for good reason. If you want to gamble with your own money, it is one thing, but when you are starting to gamble on credit, it is very risky behaviour. The rollout of this technology and the Crown wallet will allow sufficient time for Crown to transition players to cashless gaming and mitigate the significant operational and financial impact of cash limits. This is going to assist Crown to transition to cashless gaming. As the current legislation stands, there is no ability to externally fund before the imposition of cash limits and such and no ability for Crown to transition patrons to cashless gaming. I know that Crown is currently working with the Department of Justice and Community Safety on regulations to retain harm minimisation measures.

In terms of economic contribution to Victoria's economy and the significance that Crown offers, there is no argument. It is a \$2 billion industry in Victoria, with 13,000 employees and over 1900 suppliers that it uses, so Crown is really important to the Victorian economy and certainly the tourist economy around Melbourne. Crown has invested \$200 million in remediation efforts post the royal commission, for good reason. Nobody is trying to say that should not have happened. That is not something to hang their hat on, but I just know that they have invested \$200 million to uphold the highest industry standards to try and make it the safest place to gamble in Victoria, and that is what we want.

Crown remain committed to the recommendations of the royal commission, and they have invested significantly in responsible gambling reforms. Since December 2023 Melbourne Crown has operated mandatory carded play in all electronic gaming machines, and all players engaging with EGMs at Crown Melbourne are now required to obtain and use a valid Crown player card, which is supported by the government's YourPlay program. That is now working seamlessly, hence this two-year extension would make the rest of these cashless transactions and the carded play seamless as well through Crown. The card can be used to help track and monitor play with compulsory time and spend limits, providing the necessary guardrails to help ensure that players are better able to manage their gambling activity. That is so important, because as I said earlier, gambling harm not only affects the individual but families and spreads like wildfire through the family, and that is a major concern. Obviously people have gambling concerns, and that is why this legislation needs to come in.

Since the commencement of mandatory carded play, Crown has seen an average of 5000 player sign-ups per week, going from 18 registered YourPlay players in October 2022 to over 630,000 now at the end of August 2025. So the system is working. Let us face it, it has got to work – if you want to play the poker machines in Crown, you have got to have a card. This is living proof that this is heading in the right direction to try and help gambling harm and that the system is working, and no doubt when these other recommendations are brought into line, they too will support gambling harm minimisation.

With respect to mandatory carded play and traditional games, Crown has the option to use a manual approach, like I said, but this will increase the risk of regulatory noncompliance. I know that Crown is in the process of acquiring smart table technology at a cost of \$40 million, which will assist in delivering these changes. We will see that roll out over the next six to 12 months in the trials, and then it will be fully going by 1 December 2027. The process will involve purchasing the smart tables, replacing all casino chips, integrating them into operations, training staff and informing customers about the necessary requirements, and the rollout will be complete and ready to go in 2027. If Crown does not get it right, it does not get this extension. It would cost a thousand jobs, and it would be a shame to see that happen. It is fair to say that Crown will make this target, and we want to see that happen.

I will just go on to the reforms that negatively impact pubs and clubs. I have been contacted by industry stakeholders, with them raising any concerns, and I am confident that the AHA and Community Clubs Victoria support this bill. I am confident in the knowledge that the club cap increase is unlikely to distort the broader market and the carded play deferral provides operational certainty at Crown.

There has been a bit of media around this extension. They have said that this will allow more money laundering at Crown. I think this is a little over the top. It is not recognising that it is because these mandatory changes are needed. It is just more time. It is just the essence of more time that is needed. It was also suggested that Crown is too close to government, and that is just a cheap shot at former Attorney-General Martin Pakula. That is the media having a go at him. His integrity has never been in question, and no doubt he is not about to lower his standards to appease the government of the day. Although I will not say that the government's integrity has not been compromised over the years since his departure, Martin's integrity remains intact.

As I said, we are not opposing this bill. Crown Casino will still comply with the recommendations of the royal commission. There will be a short extension, but it is an extension to ensure that the compliance can be achieved, that it is not rushed through too quickly and that no shortcuts are made in implementation, to make sure this goes seamlessly. We are not opposing the bill and hope it gets a speedy passage.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (11:16): I am pleased to have the opportunity this morning to make a contribution on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and to follow on from the comments of the lead speaker from the opposition. I note the lead speaker has indicated that the opposition will not be opposing the bill. I think the 30-minute contribution that was provided was quite measured when it comes to the matters contained within this bill and the process by which the government is implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and of course the matters of the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

As was mentioned previously, Crown Casino, since its commencement within this state down there on Southbank, has established itself as a premier entertainment precinct. That does not just go to matters of gaming, which I will come to a little bit later in the contribution, but of course to hospitality, restaurants, entertainment and many of the places that were mentioned by the previous speaker. There is of course the significance of the employment that is generated around the precinct and the connection to many of our major events – major events that increase tourism and contribute to the way in which this state operates each and every day.

What is most important and where this bill is particularly targeted goes to the royal commission that was held in this state and the report received by the government in 2021 with a range of recommendations that go to many of the concerning operations and issues that were occurring within the casino. I have, just in the time that the previous member was speaking, gone through again some of those recommendations within the more than 600-page report that was provided by the royal commission. They cover many of the matters that the previous speaker spoke about. Those issues that were really well canvassed go to many concerns that were addressed: the need for the royal commission in the first place, the need for the beefing up of powers and the importance of providing

those recommendations that are in the report. There are a number of matters that go to data collection, with recommendation 12; gambling codes, with recommendation 11; and carded play, which I will talk to shortly. And there are a whole range of others that were found to be of serious concern and were identified within the process that was taken.

The genesis, in many ways, of the bill that is before the house this morning goes to those recommendations and improving the way that the casino is able to operate and the provisions and functions to which are contained within the gambling framework and the matters that go to harm minimisation within this state.

There is of course a series of work that is underway that goes to those matters, but what the bill before us this morning looks at is the amendment to the Casino Control Act 1991 to support the implementation of some of those royal commission recommendations which I have just spoken about and ensuring that the regulator, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, has the powers needed to hold the casino operator to account. The bill also amends – and we heard this previously – the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to improve market flexibility, making it easier for community clubs that want to step back from gaming to do so without increasing the statewide cap on pokies.

This bill goes to making sure that those recommendations are implemented. I think what should be noted is the consideration and the time needed for those recommendations to be put in place properly. The consideration of all of the factors that go into the way the operation is occurring is significant, and I dare say that a number of members will touch on some of those wider economic benefits that go to matters that I spoke to earlier but also to the reforms, which are very, very important to increase the safety and protection around the way that gambling occurs, and to those recommendations and their implementation, which is of course why the royal commission was held in the first place.

The bill builds upon the nation-leading reforms that we have already implemented and are being implemented through pubs and clubs across the state: the mandatory carded play at Crown on EGMs, the precommitment, the mandatory 4 am to 10 am closure in pubs and clubs, the \$100 load-up limits, the slower spin rates and of course the provisions for cash withdrawals from EFTPOS machines. Making sure that these are in place is incredibly important, but what the report found – and it is extensive at, as I mentioned earlier, over 600 pages – is that the government should make sure it has, via the regulator and through other functions and powers within both this and other legislation, the opportunity to provide for a safer environment, which goes to many of the concerns that were raised by the community.

What is also really important – and the lead speaker also touched on this – is the increases to penalties for noncompliance with direction from the regulator relating to the transformation plan. I have not touched on the transformation plan. It is long and comprehensive, as is the royal commission report, and that goes to the implementation of those measures that were contained to provide for a much safer environment. The increase of the penalties that I mentioned earlier relating to that transformation plan, from a \$10,000 one-off fine up to \$1 million per day, make for increased penalties and therefore lead to increased change.

The safeguards and provisions through the transformation plan, the work of the royal commission and indeed the powers that were provided through the previous reforms go to making sure that those practices that were identified and were really well canvassed in the royal commission have the opportunity to provide for further safeguards.

I note the comments that were made by the previous speaker as well. I certainly agree on the ever and ongoing change and challenge that exists within this space, but there is opportunity for jobs to be provided and economic activity to be driven, but also to be able to do so in a safe and appropriate manner.

It is of course about striking a balance. It is about making sure that these matters are dealt with. The commitment of the government to implement the recommendation stands, and it needs to stand in an appropriate way. But providing for a more structured and more timely approach gives the opportunity for the venue – ‘venues’ we could say; ‘venue’ in its entirety – to provide for a better set of circumstances to lead to a better outcome, and that is why this piece of legislation is important. It is why the government have worked closely with the regulator and closely with the venue to make sure that we arrive at this place, and then to be able to provide for the additional penalties that are in place is really important. It is sending a message that breaches are not okay and making sure that of course the work continues.

It is through these measures and the measures that I mentioned earlier – a number of those, which I am sure will be mentioned by other speakers – which go to providing that additional support and of course that certainty, as we move forward in this period of transition and transformation. It is really important that those opportunities occur and that the work is done. With those fairly brief comments, I will happily commend the bill to the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (11:26): I rise to address the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. In doing so, I give credit to the Shadow Minister for Gaming and Liquor, the member for Ovens Valley, for his leadership of this bill from an opposition perspective. As I plan to articulate in this contribution, this is an important bill. It is an important bill for Victoria’s broad economic stability and security, and it is an important bill because at this time in Victoria’s existence we need a little bit of positivity and we need more opportunity for people to retain highly paid jobs to be able to provide for themselves and their family.

In October 2021 the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence handed down some 33 recommendations, including mandatory carded play and 24-hour limits on cash deposits or withdrawals of up to \$1000 per day. As the member for Ovens Valley described, the purpose of this bill is to amend the Casino Control Act 1991, to do a couple of things, including to extend the deadline for cashless gaming and mandatory carded play.

Crown Melbourne are the largest single employer in Victoria, with over 13,000 employees. Carded play has been adapted to all Crown EGMs and to their electronic gaming tables. For those who are playing along at home who do not know what electronic gaming tables are, those are the consoles where you can sit and play, for example, blackjack or roulette against a machine and not a real person. The traditional gaming tables, which are either serviced by a croupier or a dealer, with games like blackjack and roulette, make it somewhat more difficult to have a carded play system. This requires new technology – gaming tables that are in the final stages of development and trial but that will not be available by the 1 December deadline, as recommended by the royal commission. Therein lies the problem, the conundrum, which is one of the reasons why we are considering this bill today.

As I am advised, Crown Melbourne will miss their deadline from the royal commission for 100 per cent carded play in Crown Melbourne by 1 December 2025. To their credit, Crown are investing some \$40 million to introduce this new technology and are working to implement this as soon as practicable. But unfortunately, this will not happen by 1 December 2025, hence they are seeking an extension for the traditional gaming tables to be converted to carded play until 1 December 2027. As the shadow minister has outlined, we will not oppose this bill. I dare say the Greens will bring on a division close to 5 pm tomorrow evening at the guillotine for the consideration of government business and government bills. I dare say at this point we on this side of the house will indicate our support for the bill.

I have a couple of points. Firstly, it might be strange for me as a member of the opposition – the alternative government – to say this, but I would like to give credit to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Mr Erdogan, in the other place for recognising the problem, for consulting with his stakeholders and for having the courage to bring forward through government processes, including cabinet processes, the bill which this house is considering today. I give to the credit to the

minister for doing that, for a number of reasons. Firstly, I think that there are a number of members of the government and a number of members of the cabinet who would not be disposed to agree with such changes as are being proposed by the government in their bill today. In fact I am of the understanding that there were at least two cabinet ministers that vehemently opposed the bringing forward of this bill, possibly more, and I think it is important to give credit to the minister for standing up to those opponents, because I think that the bill before the house today is an entirely sensible outcome.

I also want to draw attention to the Greens party. I am sure at some point in the very near future they will come into this place and they will articulate, through their interpretation of what is reasonable and justifiable, why they oppose this bill. I say to those Greens members: you have on many occasions said that you are on the side – forgive me for using that phrase, Acting Speaker De Martino; that the Greens are on the side – of vulnerable Victorians. The Greens are on the side of the downtrodden. The Greens are the custodians of all that is morally upright and good and true. For those more measured and sensible amongst us – and I even look to the government benches and count a small selection of government members in that category – they are absolutely and utterly on the wrong side of history when it comes to this. The Greens party, by opposing this bill – which I am sure they will do, as indicated by their question to the Premier in question time just last week – are putting some 13,000 jobs of Victorians at risk. The 13,000 jobs equate to those employees of Crown Melbourne providing for some 13,000 families and offering those more than 13,000 Victorians the opportunity to provide for themselves and for their family and to stand on their own two feet.

To those not only in the Greens party but in the Twitterati and the broader commentariat who refer to this bill as a sweetheart deal for Crown Casino, let me be very clear: this is a piece of legislation that ensures that Crown Casino can continue to employ those 13,000 people that work onsite. The vast majority of workers at Crown come from the western, northern and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. They are largely made up of culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in our state. What those people who say and refer to this bill as simply a sweetheart deal for Crown are doing is negating the dignity that every one of those 13,000 Victorians deserves, negating the dignity that those more than 13,000 Victorians not only deserve but have through the opportunity that employment at Crown provides. We speak about the dignity of work in some sort of metaphysical way, but the dignity of work is a real thing. It is a very real thing. It enables Victorians right around this state to provide for themselves, to provide for their family, to put a roof over their head, to provide for their children, to pay their bills – ever-increasing bills after 11 years of this Labor government.

But it is not just about employees; it is also about how much Crown spends in Victoria. Annually I am advised Crown spends some \$417 billion in Victoria across over 1890 businesses, and the vast majority of those are in fact small to medium sized businesses. In fact in my own community I am advised that Crown spends some \$1.2 million on SMEs. These are the same businesses that continue to feel the heat and the pain of 11 years of a Labor government here in this state. Whether it be through the payroll tax, whether it be the government's emergency services tax, whether it be their COVID debt levy on medium to large businesses, whether it be land tax hikes hitting business and property owners or whether it be the ongoing WorkCover premium increases, the reality and the truth of the matter is that under this Labor government we in Victoria have the highest taxes in the country and the highest business taxes in the country. This is why the ANZ bank made their announcement yesterday, which all Victorians should be deeply concerned about.

Again, the opposition does not oppose this bill. We think it is the best thing to do at this time, especially to give those more than 13,000 Victorians who are employed at Crown the certainty they need and to give their families the certainty that they need also.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:36): We know that the Allan Labor government has led the nation in casino reform and in tackling gambling harm. We established the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and are delivering on all 33 recommendations. This shows

unequivocally our collective dedication to making sure that we do all we can to minimise gambling harm. We have spoken many times in the chamber about the significant impact that this kind of gambling can have on a person's life – an addiction to gambling – hence the imperative to bring about the controls which we are discussing today. In particular, this bill gives the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC) stronger powers, ensuring that we have a watchdog with the authority to hold Crown to account.

Crown is working towards delivering its commitments under the Melbourne transformation plan. What is that? Basically, it is a program of improved compliance, operations, customer experience, gambling harm minimisation and investment over the coming years. To make sure those commitments are met, the bill increases penalties for noncompliance with a direction from the regulator relating to the Melbourne transformation plan from a \$10,000 one-off fine to up to \$1 million a day. We can see therefore the unequivocal commitment to making sure that we do get correct and appropriate compliance with those regulations already in place and those that we are bringing into being. What this really is also doing is making sure that Crown cannot drag its feet on implementing reforms, because in anyone's language \$1 million a day would mount up very quickly. We are also extending regulation to Crown's corporate associates, allowing discipline of parent holding companies and third-party partners. Importantly, this bill also strengthens money laundering safeguards by enabling cashless funding sources, paving the way for the commencement of daily cash limits. Together these changes give the government watchdog greater powers to monitor the casino's activities and ensure stronger accountability.

I just do want to reiterate that our Allan Labor government is leading the way in reforms to limit Victoria's exposure to gambling harm. That cannot be overstated. I certainly also commend the minister for her dedication and commitment. Of course we are absolutely collectively united unequivocally on these reforms, recognising the dangers that addictive gambling behaviour can cause.

Carded play has been in place at Crown since the end of 2023. So if we are looking at what reforms have been implemented in terms of practical measures to help minimise gambling harm, this has been implemented on all electronic gaming machines and will be extended to electronic table games this year. And now our nation-leading account-based play reforms are being trialled through three LGAs: Dandenong, Monash and Ballarat. This is giving players in pubs and clubs greater visibility over their gambling and empowering them to make safer choices – because I suppose fundamentally you cannot change a habit unless you are being really honest and confronting it and are absolutely aware of what you are actually doing. And without seeking to superimpose what it must be like to have a gambling addiction, I can imagine that with the significant emotional element to it, probably an element of that is blurring the line and underestimating the ramifications of those behaviours. So we are providing literally a mirror through these mechanisms for the person who is undertaking this gambling or who is using electronic gambling machines and the like. It means that they have better accountability, if you like, from a personal level in terms of what they are doing literally to themselves and of course anyone else who may be impacted by their behaviour.

The bill builds on and extends these reforms by making sure the next stage is implemented effectively with the right technology in place, so the reforms are delivered in full and can also stand the test of time. That includes mandatory carded play on traditional table games such as roulette and blackjack and the daily \$1000 cash limit across the casino floor. I have to say, personally, I feel fortunate. I think I have tried an electronic gaming machine once, and I did not particularly enjoy it, and I am very glad that I did not enjoy it. But I can imagine, for those who do enjoy that activity, that there can be risks and temptation and perhaps exceeding what is a safe limit, so I am very pleased that we are continuing to strengthen the scrutiny with regard to gambling in terms of electronic gaming machines and other types of machines that one finds in a casino or maybe a local pub or club.

There are a couple of other points that I want to speak to. I see I have got a bit more time; that is good. Many community clubs want to step back from gaming – and I have heard this problem mentioned before, certainly in my local area as well – but cannot find buyers for their entitlements, which is

certainly very frustrating and restrictive. This bill will help that by increasing the maximum number of entitlements a single club operator can hold, and so this reform will create more flexibility in the entitlement market, making it easier for community clubs that want to step back from pokies to find a buyer, while preserving the community benefits that clubs and RSLs provide. An important caveat with this, though: this change does not add a single new machine, the statewide cap remains in place and there are no changes to caps at individual venues or LGAs.

Really, the reforms that we are bringing about are building on Victoria's record of nation-leading gambling reform. No other state has gone as far as Victoria to keep gaming safe and accountable. First off, we established the VGCCC, the strongest regulator in Australia, and we have already delivered reforms that have reshaped gaming in pubs and clubs across the state. What does this look like? We have mandatory carded play at Crown on electronic gaming machines; YourPlay statewide precommitment – the only jurisdiction in Australia with voluntary precommitment available on all EGMs; and mandatory 4 am to 10 am closures in pubs and clubs. And thinking about human beings and your acuity between 9 and 5 versus where you might be at those early hours of the morning and your ability to discern what is appropriate or not appropriate and whether you are looking after your best interests or otherwise, this is very sensible reform also to help temper decisions that might not be made with sufficient sleep and rest and appropriate temperance.

Slower machine spin rates – new EGMs must have a minimum 3-second spin, reducing the losses per hour, so you can see a pragmatic correlation there that is very sensible. Limiting EFTPOS cash withdrawals to \$500 per card in 24 hours – again, tempering the potential losses that one might experience should one seek to gamble more than is relative to income and capacity or otherwise.

These are certainly some really strong and pragmatic reforms. I think it is pretty evident the rationale that underpins them. There has been a lot of hard work to implement these various measures to help make Victoria overall safer when it comes to, and to minimise the harms that can result from Victorians engaging in, the various types of gaming machines. I am very pleased, on that note, to be able to commend the bill to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:46): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Gambling is always an area I have been interested in, professionally and personally – professionally because of the first shadow ministry that I had when I was elected. Way back in 2006 then leader Ted Baillieu appointed me as Shadow Minister for Gaming even before I was sworn in. That was the very first portfolio that I had. I was up against an up-and-coming young minister by the name of Daniel Andrews at the time – not the first time we faced off in this place. But it was a great area because it is both a regulatory portfolio and an economic portfolio and it has got some social issues as well. That is why it is a real art and a science to try and get the regulation right when it comes to the regulation of gambling.

We acknowledge that gambling is an activity that adults are entitled to undertake, but we also know that some significant harm can come from poor gambling choices and that can be devastating. Years ago, the Productivity Commission undertook a report into Australia's gambling industries, and it found, I think, that about 0.7 per cent of the Australian population had very serious gambling problems and about 2.3 per cent of the population had mild to moderate gambling problems. While that is a relatively small proportion of the population, the devastation for those individuals and for their families was really significant. The fact that those problem gamblers – or people with gambling harm, to use the modern term – contributed a lot of the revenue to various gambling companies was an issue. And unfortunately we have seen an increase in the amount of crime that is been committed by people with gambling dependencies to try and feed those habits. Gambling harm has a significant spread right throughout the community, and this is why it is so important to get the regulation right.

When I was gaming minister from the end of 2010 to about March 2013 we introduced a number of reforms. We removed ATMs from pokies venues, which was a really important measure. It used to be that pokie venues would have ATMs and people could maybe set themselves an internal limit –

‘Maybe I’ll only spend \$100’ – go up, play that \$100, lose that \$100 and then pop around to the ATM in the next room, get more money and keep gambling. The thinking behind removing ATMs from gambling venues was to require people to walk out of the venue and go down the street to find an ATM if they were desperate to do so. But even just that break, that walk, that time away from the machines gave people an opportunity to pause, to think and to reconsider whether they really wanted to go back in. Or the alternative was, because some people obviously still did need to access cash, you could undertake EFTPOS withdrawals, but only via a staff member.

Staff members in gaming venues are required to undertake responsible service of gambling training, and part of the RSG training involves identifying people who may be suffering from gambling harm and opportunities to provide information or to intervene in a discreet way to give people an opportunity to reconsider their actions. That was part of a number of suites of gambling reforms that were brought in under the former government, which I was very proud to lead as minister at the time.

We also established a body known as the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF). Previously, work that was done on problem gambling research, problem gambling counselling and support and even advertising, communications to people who are at risk of gambling harm, was all done in silos across government. We thought it made a lot more sense to consolidate these functions, to bring them together under one roof, and that roof would be called the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. As the author of that policy I can say I unashamedly ripped off VicHealth, because VicHealth has been an extremely successful model. Part of the VicHealth model is to have parliamentary representatives, because gaming policy from time to time becomes very politically contested, and I thought we were going to be able to get better outcomes and a more bipartisan view if we had a foundation board which had members of Parliament from across the political aisle. We would all have a seat at the table, we would all understand what actions were being taken and what research was driving those actions and therefore, hopefully, we would be able to have a more sustainable and cohesive approach as a Parliament to how we tackle gambling-related harms. We also needed more funding, because for all the money that governments make out of taxation on gambling, not a lot of that goes back into tackling gambling-related harm or preventing gambling-related harm. So in that first budget of that Liberals–Nationals government we increased by 41 per cent the total budget for the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

I do have to say I was extremely disappointed when this current government took the decision to abolish the VRGF last year. I think that was a retrograde step. We have now seen the functions of the responsible gambling foundation once again put into silos across different departments, and I think that that means there is a real risk that the importance of action to tackle gambling harm is going to be lost. I do not think we will have the same accountability that we had when we had the VRGF operating, and we will not have the same access to bipartisanship that we had when we had the VRGF operating. I cannot understand why the government did it other than potentially to save some money, and I do not think that is a good enough reason to have abolished a model that was effective. It was not a perfect model. There was an Auditor-General’s report which indicated there were ways in which that model could be improved, and I think that was something that people on all sides of Parliament would have been happy to accept. But I am disappointed that we did not see those recommendations adopted. Instead, the government decided to throw the baby out with the bathwater and simply abolish the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

In relation to the matters currently before us, obviously Crown Melbourne, under its previous ownership and management – and I stress, under its previous ownership and previous management – was found by the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence to be unsuitable to hold Victoria’s casino licence, in October 2021. As a consequence of that, a number of recommendations were made. I should just perhaps very briefly quote from the royal commission report:

Within a very short time, the Commission discovered that for many years Crown Melbourne had engaged in conduct that is, in a word, disgraceful. This is a convenient shorthand for describing conduct that was variously illegal, dishonest, unethical and exploitative.

That is a very damning finding. The government has attempted to implement a number of the recommendations arising from that Finkelstein royal commission. We are supportive of those recommendations being implemented. I had the opportunity to have a tour of Crown Melbourne, which I should say, under its current management and current ownership, seems to have really lifted its game a lot, and it needed to, given what it inherited. To see some of the safety and security technology that is operating down at Crown Melbourne, the facial recognition technology to identify people who have self-excluded or been excluded by regulators to make sure they cannot enter the premises or, if they do, they are removed very quickly – it is top notch.

The fact that there is already cardless play operating in relation to gaming machines is a very positive thing as well. Part of this bill is to extend the timeframe for the implementation of cashless technology on table games on the basis that it simply is not available to be implemented at this point in time. As the member for Ovens Valley and as the member for Sandringham mentioned in their contributions, we do not want to see jobs put at risk. While as legislators it is easy for us to write a law that says ‘You shall do this’, if the technology simply does not exist to do it at this time, then I think we need to be practical. I do think this bill is practical in that sense. For that reason the opposition does not oppose it. We do think Crown has an important place in Melbourne’s and Victoria’s tourism offerings and major event offerings.

I was at the My Room charity ball two weeks ago at the Palladium – a fantastic night. It raised a lot of money for My Room, which is a charity that supports kids with cancer at the Royal Children’s Hospital. I think Crown does a lot of good, but it does need to be kept on a strict regulatory leash, as does every operator in the gambling space, because the prospect of gambling harm is very real and can be quite devastating for those who experience it. On that basis we think this is a sensible bill, a pragmatic bill and one that gets the balance right, and the opposition will not be opposing it.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (11:56): It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak about this bill. I am pleased that we have got consensus across the aisle. I hope to see this bill pass with good passage. As *Hansard* will show, I have spoken about gambling and gambling harm on a number of occasions in this place. I think that the matter is one that is of importance to everybody in this place and to us as a society and a community, because gambling impacts so many lives. It reflects my passion about the issue, and I make no bones about the fact that I despise gambling, especially automated gambling, because I know the terrible toll which it takes on far too many people in our state, especially our elderly and our vulnerable. I consider it one of the most important duties of good government to do all that it can to eliminate gambling, mitigate the social evil and help those that it does impact to repair their lives.

But the numerous times that I have spoken on this matter in this place reflect something else too, and that is the work and serious action that this government has taken and is taking to tackle gambling head-on. Since the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence handed down its report in October 2021 this Labor government has completely overhauled the oversight of Victoria’s gaming industry and held Crown Casino accountable for the behaviour unearthed by the royal commission. We have established a dedicated gambling regulator and its own casino division to hold the casino and the industry to the highest standards of integrity. We have delivered on our commitments as a government. All royal commission recommendations have been implemented, are underway or have been enshrined in legislation for implementation.

This piece of legislation before us today, the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, delivers on the government’s commitment to holding Crown to the highest standards on its day-to-day operation of the Melbourne casino. It proposes to increase scrutiny of Crown Melbourne and Crown Melbourne’s corporate associates and support the modernisation of casino operations and implementation of the royal commission reforms. It proposes to introduce tough new disciplinary action the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission can take against Crown and its corporate associates. Specifically, the legislation proposes to give the commission the power to, firstly, fine Crown up to \$1 million for every day it fails to comply with a commission direction relating to

the Melbourne transformation plan and, secondly, fine Crown's corporate associates if they fail to respond to the regulator's direction or fail to provide information to the regulator. The legislation also provides updated timelines to allow Crown to phase out cash at the casino, providing time to develop, test and roll out cashless technology and transition staff and customers to the new systems.

This bill amends the Casino Control Act 1991 to support the implementation of the royal commission's recommendations and ensure the regulator has the powers that it needs to hold the casino operator to account. The bill also amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to improve market flexibility, making it easier for community clubs that want to step back from gaming to do so, without increasing the statewide cap on poker machines.

With this bill the Allan Labor government is holding Crown to account by arming the regulator with tough new powers to enforce compliance. The Allan Labor government continues to maintain a zero-tolerance policy for unlawful practices whilst delivering gambling harm minimisation across the entire system.

The Allan government has led the nation in casino reform and tackling gambling harm. We established the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, and Crown accepted and is delivering on all 33 of the recommendations. This bill builds on those reforms by strengthening scrutiny and ensuring the royal commission reforms are delivered in full and for the long term. It gives the regulator, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, or the VGCCC, as it is otherwise known, stronger powers, ensuring that we have a watchdog with the authority to hold Crown to account.

Crown says that it is working towards delivering its commitments under the Melbourne transformation plan, a program with improved compliance, operations, customer experience and investment in reducing gambling harm over the coming years. That is welcome, but I will believe all of these things when I actually see them. To make sure that those commitments are met, the bill increases penalties for noncompliance with the direction from the regulator relating to the Melbourne transformation plan from a \$10,000 one-off fine to up to \$1 million per day. This means that Crown cannot simply drag its feet on implementing these reforms. We are also extending regulation to the Crown's corporate associates, allowing discipline of parent holding companies and third-party partners. And this bill strengthens money laundering safeguards by enabling cashless funding sources, paving the way for the commencement of daily cash limits. Together, these changes give the government watchdog greater powers to monitor the casino's activities and ensure stronger accountability.

The Allan Labor government is leading the way in reforms to limit Victoria's exposure to gambling harm. Carded play has been in place at Crown since the end of 2023 on all electronic gaming machines, and it will be extended to electronic table gaming this year.

I did a tour of the casino last year, and I have got to say it is an incredible building and an incredible space that many people have gone to. I know that some in this chamber have reflected on the varied activities that take place there. It is literally like a mini city. There are 13,000 staff at Crown Casino, of which, proudly, 368 live in Kororoit. There are 26 million visitors each year to the casino, and on weekends it is an absolute hub for social activity, with busy nights seeing over 100,000 patrons. Yes, there are bad elements to gambling, which I am not a fan of, but at the same time the casino does have many social activities which many people do enjoy and get to go to, and we are lucky to have it here in Victoria.

Our nation-leading account-based player reforms are being trialled across three local government areas, Dandenong, Monash and Ballarat, giving players in pubs and clubs greater visibility over their gambling and empowering them to make safer choices. This bill builds on and extends those reforms by making sure that the next stage is implemented effectively with the right technology in place so that reforms are delivered in full and stand the test of time. I look forward to them being rolled out in all electorates, especially in my electorate of Brimbank and Melton, where we have, unfortunately, the

biggest losers in the state. That includes mandatory carded play on traditional table games such as roulette and blackjack and a daily \$1000 cash limit across the casino floor.

This government was always clear, when we announced these reforms, that they depended on technology that does not yet exist – smart tables and RFID-enabled chips – which is why we adopted a staged implementation. Without that technology, enforcement would rely on manual dealer processes that are prone to error and abuse, making the reforms obviously harder to deliver. By updating the commencement timeline the bill provides the time needed for the technology to be rolled out, tested and made sure that it is all okay. These reforms will still be delivered in full, but they will be delivered properly, ensuring that Crown is held to account and Victoria continues to lead the nation in reducing gambling harm. The minister also retains the power to bring forward the date if the technology is ready earlier.

Many community clubs want to step back from gaming but cannot find buyers for their entitlements. This bill helps that by increasing the maximum number of entitlements a single club operator can hold. This reform will create more flexibility in the entitlement market, making it easier for community clubs that want to step back from pokies to find a buyer, while preserving the community benefits that clubs and RSLs provide to the community.

We have seen this work before. When the cap was last lifted in 2017, it enabled AFL clubs to leave gaming altogether and strengthen the social licence. Most importantly, this change does not add a single new machine. The statewide cap remains in place, and I think that is a very important thing to reflect on. There are no changes to the caps in any of the local government areas.

This bill builds on Victoria's record of nation-leading gambling reform, and no other state has gone as far as Victoria. We established the VGCCC, which is the strongest regulator in Australia, and we have already delivered reforms that reshaped gaming in pubs and clubs across the state, including mandatory carded play; the YourPlay statewide precommitment; the mandatory 4 am to 10 am closures in pubs and clubs; the \$100 load-up limit, which is down from \$1000; the slower machine spin rates; limiting EFTPOS cash withdrawals to \$500 per card in 24 hours; and a statewide EGM pokies cap until 2042, freezing the total number of pokies in our state.

This legislation also builds on our reforms at Crown Casino. These include mandatory registered carded play on all electronic gaming machines, including electronic tables from this year; binding precommitment limits on EGMs, helping players manage their gambling and avoid harm; load-up limits reduced from \$2000 to \$1000, so that patrons cannot load large sums into a machine all at once; player activity statements; limits on hours of play; and a ban on junkets. This bill is the next step in the record, ensuring that Crown reforms are locked in and that harm minimisation continues.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:06): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

The reason that the debate should be adjourned is because there are so many more important things that this Parliament should be discussing for the benefit of Victorians. The reason that we are here in this house, in the people's house, is to represent the issues that are most important to Victorians, and right now the most important issue to Victorians is the soaring crime crisis here in Victoria under the watch of the Labor government.

Certainly there are many motions on the notice paper that could be discussed that are of significant importance. I mean, a motion was put to the house today that, sadly, this Labor government, this tired Allan Labor government, denied us speaking on. The fact is this Labor government and the Deputy Premier moved to silence the opposition and to silence the Leader of the Opposition from raising serious matters of violent crime here in Victoria, and what that ultimately does is to silence the voices of victims of crime.

Only last weekend we saw the horrific, brutal murders of two children, and being a mum of two teenagers myself, I cannot even imagine the anguish and the pain for the parents, the families and the friends of the 12-year-old and the 15-year-old who were brutally hacked to death by machetes. Machetes and the crime caused by machetes and gangs in this state are of unacceptable proportions, and yet the Labor government takes no action. Time after time they want to have meetings and they want to set up taskforces – they are not taking the action, and that is precisely why we want to adjourn debate right now. We want to be debating the topic that is of immediate importance to Victorians, and that is Victoria's crime crisis. Dare I say, we could also be talking about the cost-of-living crisis, but most pertinent to Victorians right now is the fact that they do not feel safe in their own homes. Victorians do not feel safe in their own homes. They do not feel safe going out on the street just for a walk. Young children are not safe leaving a sporting precinct to go home. Our stores, our shops, our shop owners and our local supermarkets do not feel safe. Young retail workers are not safe in their shops. Even in my own electorate, local supermarkets in Mooroolbark and in Montrose have been attacked by machete-wielding thugs.

This is what matters to Victorians right now. This is precisely what we should be debating and why we should be adjourning this debate. I am not saying we should not talk about regulating the casino, but frankly, the fact that people are terrorising people in their homes, in their shops, on their streets and in shopping centres with machetes, terrorising Victorians – that is what we should be debating and discussing in this chamber right now, discussing the reforms that are crucial and critical to stopping this escalating violent crime. That is what we should be discussing.

The crime crisis in Victoria has soared. The statistics are damning of this Allan Labor government. They have been in power for 10 years, the Andrews and Allan Labor government. Labor in power for 10 years – and crime is escalating at record-high levels. It is just disgraceful.

Even in my own electorate in the Yarra Ranges, aggravated burglary is up a staggering 177 per cent. These are people in their own homes in Lilydale, in Mooroolbark, in Chirnside Park who are being terrorised – terrorised in their own homes, on their private property. These are the matters that are important to Victorians right now, and it is precisely why we should be adjourning debate. And I know that these are the matters that the opposition has been leading on. We are here because we want to give voice to the victims of crime. We want to give voice to the victims of crime, but what we saw in the chamber yesterday was a disgrace. We had the Labor government, led by the Premier, led by the Deputy Premier, silencing the Leader of the Opposition, silencing the opposition in disgraceful scenes. We were actually raising the serious matters of a 50-odd-year-old woman who had been carjacked violently and of a 12-year-old who had been hacked to death by a machete. These are terrible, terrible circumstances on the streets of Victoria, and yet all Labor wanted to do was distract, divert and silence the opposition, and it was a pure disgrace.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:11): I stand to speak against this appalling stunt of a motion. We are here to protect and look after the people of Victoria, not to play political games. One of the reasons that we are seeing extremism across our state is because we are seeing the denigration of the very institutions that make up our democracy, and for that contribution to suggest that the Speaker is in some way silencing debate is an appalling denigration of the most important institution in our democracy. I am appalled.

I am further appalled: we hear the member for Evelyn telling us that she is the mother of small children and she is fearful of crime. Let me tell the member for Evelyn: I am the mother of two boys who no longer have a father in this country, who no longer have a farm that they can inherit, because their father –

Bridget Vallance: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the father in Cobblebank no longer has a son. This is a disgrace from –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Evelyn, you can resume your seat. There is no point of order.

Michaela SETTLE: My children no longer have a father in this country or a farm to inherit because of gambling – because of the dreadful harms of gambling. And for you to come in here, for the other side to come in here, and bring in this stunt just to score another front page of the *Herald Sun* while they leave thousands and thousands of families and people in this state vulnerable to gambling harm is truly, truly abhorrent.

This is a stunt and nothing more. This is an adjournment of an incredibly important bill, and they come in here just to score political points. The Speaker yesterday named the Leader of the Opposition. It was the Speaker, and she is the most important person in this building –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, members are required to be factual, and it was actually the Labor government, the Deputy Premier, who moved the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Evelyn, there is no point of order. Member for Evelyn, resume your seat.

Michaela SETTLE: The Speaker named the opposition leader yesterday. This was not the government. This was the impartial and most important person in this institution. If those on the other side want to continue to denigrate the very institutions that support our democracy, we end up with extremism in this state. And they should think long and hard about how important their political skins are when they are putting our state at risk.

But I go back to the fact that they are adjourning off a bill that matters to thousands and thousands of Victorians – people like me and people like my family, who have seen the very, very awful harms that gambling can bring. But no, they would see us thrown to the dogs for their political games.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, *Rulings from the Chair* from Speaker Edwards, pages 54 and 55, says language should not be used to disparage colleagues personally. I think the member on her feet is using language – to say that I want to ‘throw people to the dogs’, I think is quite disparaging. I take personal offence, and I ask you to ask her to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): It has been a robust debate. I did not hear language that was directed towards specific members, but I ask that all members observe the protocols of the house.

Michaela SETTLE: It certainly was not directed at any particular member; it was directed at the entire opposition – the entire Liberal–National opposition, who will play games while people in Victoria suffer and their families suffer from gambling harm. But no, all of those on the other side, not just the member for Evelyn, would protect their own political skins before they would look after Victorian people and Victorian families. This motion for adjournment is nothing more than a stunt, but one day they will face people at the booths, at the boxes, and they will understand that Victorians care about gambling harm. Victorians want their government to come in here and make legislation that protects their families and their communities, not come in here and play games so they can get another bit in the *Herald Sun*, another grab on TikTok.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:16): I support the motion to adjourn debate because what we saw yesterday was an absolute disgrace. It was an absolute disgrace from this government, silencing the opposition from speaking on behalf of victims of crime. Ignore the government claiming that this bill does something to protect people. What this is is a sweetheart deal for Crown. This bill is a sweetheart deal that has been done between the Labor Party and Crown. That is what this bill does: it delays protecting people by two years. That is what this bill does. So anyone who cries crocodile tears about this bill somehow providing protection does not even understand what they are doing.

Paul Mercurio: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate. I ask you to bring the member back to the procedural debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Hastings, there is no point of order.

Michaela Settle: On a further point of order, Acting Speaker, I take very real personal offence at the suggestion that –

James Newbury: I didn't say anyone's name.

Michaela Settle: I have been the only speaker on this bill so far, so it can only have been directed at me. To suggest that I cry crocodile tears when my family has been ripped apart by gambling harm is obscene and offensive, and I take offence.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Eureka, I did not hear language that was directed personally towards members. But before the member for Brighton resumes, this is an emotive debate and I would ask all members to be respectful of colleagues.

James NEWBURY: Of course, Acting Speaker. Yesterday this government removed the opposition from speaking on behalf of victims of crime. The Deputy Premier moved the motion. I understand that the backbench do not understand what occurred yesterday, and that is okay, but the Deputy Premier moved the motion.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, like the point of order that was used by the other side, we need to be factual – it was the Speaker who named the Leader of the Opposition.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): It is not for the Speaker to adjudicate on debate.

James NEWBURY: We saw the opposition removed from this chamber because they were speaking on behalf of victims. We saw –

Mary-Anne THOMAS: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Brighton knows full well that he cannot stand in this place and tell lies. The opposition walked out of the chamber yesterday in complete disrespect of the Speaker.

Wayne Farnham: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, the Leader of the House knows she cannot say lies. She knows that is unparliamentary. I would ask you to call her back to order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I call the entire house to order. Member for Brighton, I would ask you to ensure that your debate and your contribution are accurate and we carry on with some decorum.

James NEWBURY: I appreciate the fact that you only made that advisory remark to the opposition. It is disappointing, and it just shows the point.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Brighton, do not reflect on the Chair, please.

James NEWBURY: I am not reflecting on the Chair; I am stating a fact. What concerns the opposition – this is outrageous.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, he has ignored your ruling not to reflect on you and continued to reflect on your good service, as indeed they do in all institutions in this place.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): There is no point of order.

James NEWBURY: This house knows and Victoria knows the Premier hid from the media for two days after two kids died. She refused to do media and refused to condole on behalf of those children. The media know it, Victoria knows it and this Parliament knows it.

Daniela De Martino: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural motion, and the member for Brighton has gone so far beyond the procedural motion to adjourn debate on the bill at hand.

Bridget Vallence interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Evelyn, I will adjudicate on the point of order without assistance. It has been a robust debate, but I ask the member for Brighton to return to the substance of the motion.

James NEWBURY: You can see that the government is trying to cover the fact that the Premier hid for days.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:22): Can I say my heart is filled with sadness for victims of crime –

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the member for Eureka's comments around the dead bodies of two children.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Warrandyte, is there a point of order?

Nicole Werner: Yes, I take offence to her statements talking about –

Members interjecting.

Nicole Werner: If I could finish my point of order –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): There is no point of order. Member for Warrandyte, I did not hear language that was directed personally towards anybody. I am not sure where offence has been taken. I do not believe there is a point of order. You can raise it with the Speaker subsequently.

Lauren KATHAGE: As I was saying –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Evelyn, if you are reflecting on the Chair, I do not think it is appropriate. I am listening to the debate. It has been a robust debate. There are a lot of people speaking concurrently, and I am doing my best to listen to the debate across the house.

Lauren KATHAGE: As I have been trying to say, I am filled with sadness for victims across Victoria and for what they have experienced, and the behaviour of those opposite fills me with shame standing here. This is the Parliament of Victoria, and those opposite are taking the sadness of victims and treating it with contempt as a political football – shame. This is a place where we seek to improve lives for victims. That is why we are here talking about victims of gambling. I myself, the member –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is precisely why we want to talk about the victims of crime, because the Labor government silenced us yesterday.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Evelyn, what is the point of order?

Bridget Vallence: The point of order is that the member is misleading the house, quite frankly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Evelyn, there is no point of order.

Lauren KATHAGE: As I said, the Leader of the Nationals opposite and I sat and listened to the voices of gambling victims in our role in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. This is part of the broad work this government is doing to make life better for victims of gambling, and they are seeking to stop that by adjourning the debate. They are the ones that are standing in the way of improvement for victims, and their behaviour, frankly, brings shame on the whole house. I ask them to put victims first and stop making it about them, about politics and about their own personal ambitions. That is shameful.

Can I be really clear that there is a separation – there is no connection between sadness for victims and what happened yesterday. Most of us here have been put out of the chamber at a different stage – I know I have, certainly, and everyone I see here has been. Yesterday I saw in a workplace a woman being yelled at. I saw aggression towards a worker here, and as is the case with every other member of Parliament, they were put out. If it was footy and someone treated the umpire like that, they would be put off for four weeks. Here somebody is put out, and they throw the dummy out of the pram.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I take personal offence at the member for Yan Yean's statements, because she speaks about respect for women every single day in this place, and the respect that is shown to the women on this side of the house is absolutely disrespectful. The Manager of Opposition Business knows it – they disrespect her every day she stands on her feet. I take offence.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warrandyte, a point of order is not an opportunity for further debate.

Tim Richardson interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for 20 minutes.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I did not hear the member for Warrandyte referred to directly. References to a collection of members are a matter for debate, not a matter of imputation. The member to continue. Let us do it calmly.

Lauren KATHAGE: I feel I am being silenced by people who wish to continue to take offence not letting us speak.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:27): I rise to support the member for Evelyn's motion to adjourn this debate, and I would like to point out a few of the facts about what this bill is actually about. Firstly, the motion is to adjourn debate on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The government members seem to be under some misapprehension about what the casino bill is actually about. I have the utmost sympathy and empathy for the member for Eureka for her personal circumstances with gambling. This is actually legislation that delays introducing further reforms to protect people from problem gambling – delays it by two years. Government members do not seem to understand that about this bill. Those of us on this side are supporting this legislation, as we did two years ago when it was first brought in. But please be under no misapprehension, anyone who is watching this: this legislation is not acting swiftly to reduce gambling harm, it is actually delaying it for two years.

To the member for Yan Yean, who is so upset and sad about the undermining of democracy: this is what democracy is. This is the opportunity for the chamber, the people's chamber, to actually debate issues. It is an absolute right of any member of this chamber to stand up at any time and move an adjournment motion, as the member for Evelyn has done, to tackle the issues that are important to Victorians, to tackle the issues that are important to regional Victorians.

Those opposite speak about respect and disrespect – ask the people who were protesting at the bush summit in Ballarat a couple of weeks ago, or on the steps of Parliament on the day of the budget, how much respect they are getting from this government on issues like the emergency services tax, when farmers were facing a 150 per cent increase in the bill that they are getting; when every single household, every single resident, every single commercial property is getting their bill right now with a 100 per cent increase in the rate of the emergency services tax they are paying; and when every industrial property is facing a 64 per cent tax increase.

The member for Eureka, the member for Yan Yean, the member for Ripon – everyone on that side all supported the legislation to approve that tax. They stand condemned, and we should be debating issues like this. At a time of a cost-of-living crisis –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, on relevance, Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Nationals is now talking about issues that have nothing to do with the motion that is before the house. I ask that you rule him out of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals had, I think, just mentioned the word ‘adjournment’, and I encourage him to continue on the adjournment procedural motion.

Danny O’BRIEN: In debating the matter before us, I am explaining why I think we need to be adjourning this legislation, to go on to other matters of importance – matters such as the government’s complete failure on energy, not just what it is doing in the energy sphere but what it is doing to regional Victorians with its steamrolling attitude.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again on relevance, the motion is to adjourn the debate to talk about a specific issue, none of which the Leader of the Nationals has raised in his contribution.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Especially in this debate that has become wider than it probably should have been, the Leader of the Nationals is allowed to rebut other members and also contrast his reasons for adjournment.

Danny O’BRIEN: The actual debate is about why we want to adjourn, and that is exactly why I am saying it, Deputy Speaker, so I thank you for your ruling.

We look at the energy sphere. As I said, the government talks to us repeatedly about how it is getting prices down, down, down. We all remember that from the minister. Yet every single household and business is seeing their prices just go up, up, up at the same time that the government is actually disrespecting regional communities, removing the right of them to appeal at VCAT if they are opposed to a renewable energy or transmission project. It is just extraordinary that a government led by a Premier supposedly from regional Victoria who got elected on the back of discontent, she readily reminds us, is actually taking away the voices of regional Victoria. The Nationals and Liberals will give that voice back. That is the sort of thing that we should be debating. We should be actually talking about that, because that policy was introduced by regulation. There was no legislation. This chamber did not actually get the opportunity to even debate that. We would actually make sure that we will give the voice back to regional Victorians, whether it is on things like the VNI West project, whether it is on transmission lines through my electorate and things like offshore wind, whether it is renewable energy projects in general. The government is stifling the voice of regional Victoria. The Nationals and Liberals will give it back. Those are exactly the sorts of things that we should be debating in this chamber.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:32): It seems that those opposite might have some confusion with the time on their clocks, be it on their phones or their wrists. It is not a grievance debate; it is not a matter of public importance – that happens at 4 o’clock. This motion to adjourn debate has turned into a word salad with the greatest hits of the opposition’s pack of stunts that they hold in their hands like a magician with a deck of cards trying to distract all those around them –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I believe you ruled in favour of the Leader of the Nationals in your recent ruling in regard to the process in which this debate is being taken, and the member for Monbulk is reflecting on your rulings.

Daniela DE MARTINO: On the point of order, there was absolutely no reflection on you as Chair, Deputy Speaker. It was a reflection on the behaviour of those opposite.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order. The member was being relevant to the debate that we are all in the middle of. There is no point of order.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Again, as I was saying, this is like a magician, but with a very tired, very sad deck of cards, trying to distract from the fact that those opposite are absolutely bereft of proper policies. All they have are slogans and a high-level paternalistic statement, because I suspect they cannot actually decide on any in-depth policies beyond ‘Tough on crime and lower taxes’. That is about all they have in that deck of cards of theirs.

I would like to correct for the record the exact events of yesterday during question time, where we saw some of the most disgraceful behaviour from the Leader of the Opposition towards the Speaker of the house. I watched, and I saw from here with my eyes the aggression on the face of that man. May I just say that with the tradition here, the actual convention is the Speaker names a person and then the requirement is that the minister at the table must move the motion.

The government did not eject; the Speaker named. Those opposite may want to brush up on standing orders and how this place works. The member for Brighton may well laugh, but perhaps there is irony in the laughter, potentially. My point is that with this motion to adjourn debate we are seeing off an incredibly important bill. The member for Eureka spoke with absolute conviction and passion, as did the member for Yan Yean. We take offence – but not the kind of offence where we are going to raise a point of order on it – that this stunt has occurred again. It is fundamentally terrible to hear the Leader of the Nationals say, ‘This is democracy.’ Actually, democracy generally requires good faith on all parts for it to work well, and at the moment it feels like there is a lack of it.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, if the Labor government had any good faith, they would be discussing the violent crime in Victoria right now. I would ask you to ask the member on her feet to come back to the relevance of why we should adjourn the debate to deal with the soaring crime crisis.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Relevance – thank you, member for Evelyn. The member will continue on the procedural motion.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Continuing on the procedural motion, it is incredibly, fundamentally disappointing to see this stunt pulled again. I tend to speak on procedural motions, and I tend to do them far more often than I would like to because we see the stunt that comes from those opposite: it is to interrupt, it is to create headlines out of this place – what a disingenuous way of going about things.

I do have to say that this bill before the house at the moment that they seek to adjourn is incredibly important. It goes far beyond what has been alluded to by those opposite who have not yet spoken on it. But I sat in that chair previously and I heard the contributions, and I also heard the full support of those opposite. So to stand up and say counter to that is quite interesting, to say the least. At the end of the day, this is baseless, and it should be absolutely condemned.

Assembly divided on Bridget Vallence’s motion:

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

Noes (50): Jacinta Allan, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson,

Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:43): It gives me great pleasure to rise and contribute in favour of this incredibly important bill this afternoon – a bill that is incredibly important not just to a lot in our community but to a lot in this chamber as well. I acknowledge the member for Eureka, who has been quite open about how gambling harm has affected her life and the lives of her family in the past.

The Allan Labor government has a long track record of implementing reforms to ensure the safety of local punters. That is why we established the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and have committed to delivering every single one of the 33 recommendations. This bill goes to a suite of those recommendations.

Do not get me wrong, gambling is a legitimate pastime here in Australia and in Victoria and a legitimate pastime that I engage in from time to time, whether that be horseracing or sport or maybe playing cards at the casino. But it is a genuine and legitimate pastime that from time to time requires government intervention to save some people from themselves, and that is exactly what the very reasonable steps included in this piece of legislation do. They make it easier or put guardrails in place for people that have identified themselves as problem gamblers – people that are finding it difficult to stop, that are gambling too much and that are experiencing harm because of it – to have easy mechanisms in place to encourage them to gamble in a more responsible manner.

The government is not all-seeing and all-knowing; we cannot absolutely guarantee that we or our reforms will always be able to save people from harm. But we are committed to creating the settings to make it easier for problem gamblers that are causing harm to themselves and to their families and to their community to gamble in a more responsible manner.

This bill supports those royal commission recommendations and also ensures that the regulator, which is the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC), has the powers it needs to hold casino operators and pubs and clubs to account. The gambling industry for some time has been somewhat of a self-regulator in this space. I think we have seen corporate bookmakers probably lead the way in respect to self-regulation on gambling harm. I am sure anyone that has a punt on sport or on the horses has seen for some time many prompts on their corporate bookmaker app to set deposit limits so they can set what they are prepared to lose at the beginning of having a bet, which is incredibly important. It is incredibly important, obviously, that you are not gambling with money that you do not have, that you are not gambling with money that is set aside for food or for bills or for rent. But what we have seen, unfortunately, is that venues, pubs and clubs with pokie machines and Crown Casino, are a fair way behind on that. They have I think for some time either failed or just not been able to appropriately, in a meaningful way, self-regulate to make it easier for people that are experiencing gambling harm to really be able to set a healthy limit as to what they may spend whilst having a bet. With that, I think it is important to take a moment to acknowledge the harm that gambling has and has the potential to cause to Victorians, to Victorian families and to communities in general, and protecting Victorians from that is an utmost priority for this government.

For those that attend Crown from time to time, they would have noticed that since 2023 carded play has been in place there for electronic gaming machines, pokie machines – I do not think the venues like you calling them pokie machines anymore, but just for my benefit, that is what I will. That has been in place since 2023, and now our nation-leading account-based play reforms are being trialled across three LGAs, Dandenong, Monash and Ballarat. This system I know has been in place in other states for some time in their casinos. If you think about South Australia, I believe carded play has been active in that Adelaide casino – why you would ever want to go to the Adelaide casino is beyond me, if you have ever been there. It has been in place there I think for the better part of a decade, if not more.

Nick Xenophon was a pretty significant driver of that back in his days as an independent representative in the Senate, being from South Australia. So that gives pubs and clubs greater visibility, obviously, over people that may be harming themselves through gambling, but it also helps people that would like to have a bet – as I said, it is a legitimate pastime – and that would like to engage in that legitimate pastime but may be concerned about their capacity to gamble in a healthy manner or may be concerned about their capacity to stop gambling once they have started.

So there is carded play, and there is a maximum deposit that you can put onto that card, which has come I think down to \$100 from \$1000, so you can limit the amount that you are going to spend on pokie machines before you begin, hopefully reducing that harm and only potentially losing what you can afford to lose.

The bill is also increasing scrutiny of the casino and ensuring that the royal commission reforms are delivered in full, and for the long term it gives the VGCCC stronger powers to hold Crown to account. That is incredibly important. We saw out of the royal commission, frankly, some unscrupulous behaviour by Crown Casino. I do not think anybody can deny that. Making sure of that scrutiny and those guardrails and transparency around the way the Crown Casino operates is incredibly important to holding Crown Casino to account. But it is obviously also just incredibly important to reduce gambling harm in Victoria, which I think everybody in this chamber thinks is a positive thing. Like I said, I am not anti-gambling, but I think where we can provide guardrails to help save people from themselves in respect to gambling harm, we should do so.

Crown Casino, as has been mentioned in previous contributions, is far more than a place to gamble. It is far more than a gambling venue. It is an entertainment venue with fantastic restaurants, retail outlets, a cinema, a huge arcade that my children love and accommodation as well. It is economically, both from employment and economic revenue, incredibly important to this state. But it is also of vital importance that we hold Crown to account when they have done something wrong and that we make sure that those attending Crown who may be vulnerable people that may harm themselves through gambling have the capacity to have those guardrails in place to reduce the possibility of that happening.

To make sure that these commitments from the royal commission are met, we are also increasing penalties for noncompliance with a direction from the regulator relating to the Melbourne transformation plan from a \$10,000 once-off fine up to \$1 million per day, which means that Crown cannot drag its feet on these reforms. I would hope that creates an enormous disincentive for Crown and the operator to do anything wrong or unscrupulous. As I have said throughout this contribution, gambling harm is a problem in Victoria, and we need to make sure that we put those guardrails in place to help vulnerable people.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (12:53): I too rise to speak on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Victorians expect this Parliament to put the interests of the community ahead of those in the gambling industry. They expect the government to protect families from harm, not to postpone the hard-won protections that the government has already promised. This bill does contain some modest good steps. It strengthens the regulator's hand against Crown and its related companies, including new powers to discipline corporate associates, and it lifts penalties so that the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC), which can already fine Crown up to \$100 million, can impose an additional \$1 million per day if Crown ignores directions tied to its Melbourne transformation plan.

The bill creates a new category called a 'corporate associate', for example a holding company. If one of these companies fails to cooperate with the regulator, does not give required information or is found unsuitable, the VGCCC can issue a censure letter or a fine up to \$1 million. Those changes are a response to the royal commission era and the long list of breaches that led to Crown's \$450 million AUSTRAC penalty. We support stronger enforcement and clearer lines of accountability. But the same bill delays life-saving harm reduction measures and delays implementation of royal commission recommendations against money laundering, which we know fuels organised crime.

We have been hearing a lot about crime lately in this chamber, and I am sure we are going to hear more calls for locking up teenagers for longer and promises from the government to increase the number of unsentenced prisoners in this state. But this is a bill which will allow gangsters to continue to disguise the profits of their crime as casino winnings. So this bill is not just soft on crime, it is aiding and abetting it.

Let us look at what it does. It pushes back the start date for key cashless controls – from limits on cash accepted on the casino floor to identity verification and paying larger wins electronically – from 1 December this year to 1 December 2027, so that is two years more of money laundering for organised crime. It also defers the application of the carded play division to 2027, even as it technically clarifies that carded play is required across table games. In plain terms the bill slows the rollout of the very tools – cashless gaming and mandatory player cards – that help people set limits, that curb money laundering and that stop losses from spiralling. This bill is a step backwards.

Let us remember why carded play matters: when people must use a card, set a limit, verify who they are and receive large payouts electronically rather than in cash, the data show who is playing, how much and whether interventions are needed to reduce gambling harm and avoid money laundering. Experts have been clear for years: precommitment and design changes perform better than posters and pamphlets. Those are the measures that actually reduce harm. Technical rollout issues are solvable; other jurisdictions already run precommitment systems. The only real question is whether Victorian Labor has the political will to switch it on now, not in two years.

We should be honest about the scale of the problem. Victorians lose billions to poker machines every year, with the heaviest losses in lower income suburbs. Even Labor MPs have called this a moral issue inside their own caucus. Meanwhile, budgets continue to rely on gaming taxes over the forward estimates. This is precisely why delayed protections are so dangerous: the longer we wait, the more people are harmed and the more reliant the budget becomes on that harm.

Campaigners have been vocal. The Alliance for Gambling Reform and chief advocate Tim Costello have condemned these delays, saying we cannot keep postponing reforms that prevent addiction and save families from financial ruin. They are right. We heard the same message when the government missed earlier milestones and then delayed the statewide carded play trial. The pattern is delay, consultation and more delay, while losses keep mounting.

Delaying carded play also delays anti-money-laundering protections. At their core carded play and cash rules are not just about harm minimisation; they are also frontline controls against money laundering. This bill pushes back two pillars of that control at the casino until 1 December 2027. The first is the \$1000 per day cash acceptance cap, and the second is the rule that winnings or credits over \$1000 must be paid electronically and only after ID is verified. Those two levers make it much harder to wash cash via a rapid buy-in and cash out or to cycle illicit money through machines and walk away with clean funds.

The explanatory memorandum for the bill says the delay is to support ‘effective operationalisation’, but a delay is still a delay, and during that time the cash status quo remains easier to exploit. In other words, money laundering will just keep on going for another two years because of this bill. Even the government’s own notes make clear that these settings are about phasing out large cash payouts and tightening traceability. The explanatory memorandum explains that the bill expands how cashless gaming accounts can be funded – like through EFT from a patron’s own bank account – to support the eventual phasing out of large cash amounts at the casino. In other words, the destination is traceable non-cash play, but this bill moves the arrival date out two years at precisely the moment we should be locking in protections against money laundering.

We do not have to guess about the risks. The Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence heard direct evidence from Victoria Police that the casino’s cash-heavy environment has long been

attractive to criminals wanting to turn illicit notes into apparently legitimate funds. One experienced officer explained the standard method in plain terms.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Transport Infrastructure

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise that for the purposes of question time today I will answer questions for the portfolios of transport infrastructure, and public and active transport.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, yesterday during question time there were a number of points of order raised by the Leader of the Opposition and opposition members which I could not actually hear the contents of, because of the wall of noise that the Leader of the Opposition and other opposition members were being exposed to at the time. My understanding of the standing orders is that every member of this place deserves respect and to be heard in silence.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Your point of order is, member for Sandringham?

Brad Rowswell: I simply make the request that during today's question time your attention could be drawn to this matter.

The SPEAKER: Can I remind members, as I did yesterday, that respect goes a long way in this chamber – from both sides of the chamber – and disrespect will not be tolerated. There will be sanctions placed on members who do not respect the standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. In Doreen last week a mother watched in horror as her car was stolen with her two four-year-olds. The offenders dumped the children on the side of the road with no care for their safety. This was the second carjacking in a week where children were in the vehicle. How many more children need to be abducted, torn from the safety of their parents and left at the mercy of violent criminals before the Premier finally admits that her failure to address community safety is putting children and families at risk?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, can I first also acknowledge that I saw the footage of that incident. As a mum of two kids of my own, it was absolutely horrifying and I can only imagine the terror that family experienced in that instant when this criminal act was perpetrated on their family. Our thoughts are with those families, as indeed they are with all victims of crime. In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, listening to victims of crime is why, as a government, we have already acted. We have already acted to toughen the penalties for serious repeat offending, like that which he referred to, which is causing so much concern in our community. It is why we toughened the bail laws. It is why we have given –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! We just had a conversation, members, about respect.

Jacinta ALLAN: Clearly those opposite are not following the advice from the member for Sandringham, and I appreciate the member for Sandringham's support on that matter.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back. On relevance, this is about children abducted and what the Premier is doing.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was indeed addressing the question directly, because the Leader of the Opposition asked about action of government, and I was taking him through the actions that we have already taken this year. For example, in toughening our tests, the carjacking offence is at the highest level under our bail laws. We are giving police additional powers, along with resources, and we will continue to act, as we have just done recently in terms of the second wave of bail reforms that have been through this Parliament. We will continue to act, and it is listening to victims of crime that will continue to guide the work of our government.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Doreen is in the response of the Mernda police station. According to the Victoria Police website, Mernda police station is open 24 hours, yet when I visited it on the weekend it was closed. Can the Premier confirm that Mernda police station was closed when this carjacking took place?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Right now so much is being asked of Victoria Police. Hundreds of Victoria Police are being asked to do additional duties following the murder of two of their own. Additional duties –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. Notwithstanding the importance of what the police are doing in the High Country, this is a very narrow question about the Mernda police station. I would ask you to ask the Premier to stop debating the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier has been on her feet for just on 20 seconds. She is addressing the question that was asked of her, and I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Operational decisions are made by Victoria Police, and one of the operational decisions that the chief commissioner is tasked with right now is to do everything that the police are doing to find the individual who murdered two Victoria Police officers, and that means –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, of all people in this place I totally understand the expectation to find the killer of Victoria Police. But in relation to relevance, very specifically, we asked about the Mernda police station being shut when it is advertised as a 24-hour police station. It has been closed on many occasions for many months, according to the commander in the local area.

Jacinta ALLAN: On the point of order, Speaker, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition does not want me to conclude the answer to his question, because it will expose his politically pointscore, reckless behaviour as to why Victoria Police officers are being asked to do more. I will be very clear: I met with police officers who were stationed at stations like Mernda when they were doing extra duties in Wangaratta following the murder of two of their own.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition and Premier, there is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I repeat what I said in the point of order: when I visited the Wangaratta police station Friday a week ago, I saw the additional ask that was being put on Victoria Police officers. That included police officers from stations like Mernda, who are being asked to leave their communities to search for the man who killed two of their own.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bulleen! I remind members about respect and the point of order called by the member for Sandringham at the start of question time. Members should be listening and taking note and not interjecting, Leader of the Opposition, Premier, Leader of the House, members at the table.

Ministers statements: housing

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): Here in Victoria we are not just keeping up with the housing race across Australia, we are leading it. We are number one in home approvals, number one in home starts and number one in home completions.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Polwarth can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: In the last 12 months Victoria has built nearly 60,000 new homes – 15,600 more than New South Wales, 26,000 more than Queensland. This morning, along with the Minister for Planning, we released our plan to continue to build more homes with the draft maps released for 25 new train and tram activity centres – more homes where families want to live, near train stations but also close to jobs, close to services and close to the people they love. It is in places along the Upfield line, where we have removed level crossings and are running more trains from next year, and it is along the Belgrave and Lilydale lines in places like Hawthorn, Glenferrie and Auburn – some of Melbourne’s most connected suburbs, like this morning in Kew at the junction of the 48 and 109 trams. Consultation is open right now to hear from the local community. That of course builds on the consultation that has already been happening.

But we know not everyone agrees. Just this morning someone in this place said that no-one asked for these homes. Well, I say this –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I again thank the member for Sandringham for his reminder about the house. Maybe no-one at a Brighton branch meeting asked for this, but I say this: anyone under the age of 50 is asking for this every single day – a chance to live close to where they grew up, close to family and close to the jobs and services that they need to build their future.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. In March this year the Attorney-General said Labor’s new bail laws would squarely target the risks that come with young people committing serious and dangerous crimes while out on bail. Yet last week a 13-year-old, already bailed three times, attempted to carjack a family’s car in Ashburton while their toddler was in the back seat. Will the Premier be honest with the Victorian people and admit that her government’s bail laws are a failure?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): Again, acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition’s question, it is from listening to victims of crime like the one he referred to that saw the government act and bring back in March to this place bail laws into the Parliament. It was the very first change that was made in that legislation, and I do note that it was not supported by those opposite. It was making that change that community safety come first in all bail-making decisions. What we have seen since that fundamental change, but also the other elements of those two bail reform bills that have toughened bail, particularly for serious repeat offending, is more people on remand. More people

are being put in jail and are not being given bail as a result of the changes we have made following listening to victims of crime.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): The government's so-called toughest bail laws are clearly failing. Why should Victorians have any faith in the Attorney-General's promises on community safety when repeat violent offenders keep getting back on the streets?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): It is disappointing that the Leader of the Opposition continues to peddle this reckless misinformation. What we have seen as a result of the bail reforms that we have put through this house, the tougher bail laws to deal with this repeat offending, is that the number of people on remand has gone up by 26 per cent.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier must be accurate and factual when she is putting forward her points. If you are coming in with a 26 per cent increase in people on remand, it should be added to an 18 per cent increase in crime and 20-plus per cent increase in aggravated burglaries here in Victoria, which the victims are paying for every single day.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is reckless behaviour, this ongoing behaviour. It is a pattern of behaviour that we are seeing from the Leader of the Opposition, because it is not convenient for him to hear that the tough new bail laws that have been passed through this Parliament are making a difference.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, what is reckless is that these offenders keep getting put out on bail. I would ask you to ask the Premier to answer the question, on relevance.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: While the Leader of the Opposition will continue this pattern of reckless behaviour, like we have seen in pretty graphic detail –

Brad Battin interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I think standing next to a dead body for a press conference is pretty reckless. We will continue to listen to victims of crime and act.

Ministers statements: housing

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:17): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's plan to support businesses, upskill workers and build more homes. On this side of the house we know that more homes mean more opportunities. In order to build more homes and increase the diversity of options available, we need to be innovative in the way in which we build and support workers with the digital skills necessary to do so. That is why we are upskilling the construction and advanced manufacturing workers through the government's digital jobs program. Since 2021 the program has already helped equip more than 6000 Victorians with up-to-date digital skills, including six at iBuild in West Heidelberg, which I was recently pleased to visit alongside my good friend the Minister for Police. iBuild are an innovative prefabrication building supplier with design and manufacturing capabilities, and they provide affordable housing solutions. When I was out at iBuild I saw firsthand how quickly these home kits can be built on site. Jackson, the owner, told me that the record for constructing one of these homes was just 8 hours.

When it comes to building more homes, finding efficiencies to bring more homes more quickly to market is a massive advantage, either through planning reforms or indeed construction technologies. We are using digital skills and digital technologies, coupled with the excellent work of the Minister for Planning, to get more homes to market more quickly. We watched a wonderful home come to life there at the site at iBuild, with the steel beams being turned into kitset walls. The member and I both had the opportunity to press the button to get things going, which was great, and it will eventually be

built in Werribee by the owners. Won't the Leader of the Opposition be so jealous of the owners being only 30 minutes away from Geelong. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition could stop by while he is –

Members interjecting.

Danny PEARSON: Well, maybe you could stop there while you are on the way to jump on a cruise ship in December.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): My question is to the Premier. The CEO of Ritchies IGA said last night of retail crime that 95 per cent of their problems are in Victoria. ABS figures back him up, showing retail and personal theft is up by 29 per cent in Victoria, compared to 1 per cent in New South Wales and falling across the country. Can the Premier explain why Victoria is the retail crime capital of Australia?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): Acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition's question, I indeed answered a question last sitting week that went to the unacceptable behaviour that is being displayed in retail settings being why we are bringing strengthened legislation to protect retail workers to this Parliament later this year.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): Wesfarmers chief executive Rob Scott has said:

The only area where we're seeing stronger growth in Victoria is the sale of home security products within Bunnings ... It's quite a sad statistic to be sharing.

Why has the government made the state so unsafe that Victorians struggling with the cost-of-living crisis are now forced to buy security products to protect their families?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): In terms of supporting Victorians and listening to Victorians and their experiences, it is why we have brought in tougher penalties for repeat serious offending. Listening to retail workers is why we are strengthening the legislation for better protections for retail workers. Listening to Victorians about their challenges with cost-of-living pressures is why we are bringing in free PT for kids from next year. It is why we have another round of the power saving bonus. It is why we have doubled food relief for Victorian families.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, it is not for the Premier to bring in extraneous matters. This is quite specific about why Victorians are having to buy security systems for their homes. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that question, on relevance.

The SPEAKER: The question referred to a cost-of-living crisis. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I appreciate the Manager of Opposition Business might not want to hear about the cost-of-living support we are providing to Victorian families, but I know Victorians do. Whether it is across public transport, electricity bills, the work around food relief, the work that is happening in schools with making sure breakfast clubs are in every school, alongside the Smile Squad and free glasses for kids, this is how we are supporting the Victorian people.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:23): The Allan Labor government is opening doors, quite literally, for thousands of Victorians – families, young people and essential workers – who want to find a home in some of Melbourne's best connected suburbs. Today we released draft maps for 25 train and tram zone centres, part of our plan to deliver more than 300,000 new homes across 60 centres.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask if the minister could table the script that she is reading verbatim.

The SPEAKER: Is the minister reading or referring to notes?

Sonya KILKENNY: Referring to notes.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton will show some respect to the member on her feet.

Sonya KILKENNY: That will be new. From Hawthorn and Glenferrie on the Belgrave and Lilydale lines to Brighton and Sandringham on the Sandringham line, from Hughesdale to Tottenham – centres that are going to benefit from the Metro Tunnel that opens later this year – these are the right places for more homes: close to public transport and close to jobs and services. Each centre is different, and so are the draft maps, drafted street by street, metre by metre, with taller buildings in the core, right near the stations and trams, with gentler change in the catchments with townhouses and low-rise apartments. We want communities to have their say. That is why we opened consultation on the draft maps today, and just like with the 10 pilot activity centres, community feedback will help us finalise the plans for these 25 centres.

Let us be crystal clear: the status quo is not an option. If we do nothing, more Victorians will be locked out of the housing market, more families will be priced out and more opportunities will be lost. But there are others who want to slam the door shut. The blocker from Brighton is not interested in homes for the next generation. He is not interested in making sure young Victorians have the opportunity their parents had. We will not play those games. Here is the choice: Labor is opening doors, the Liberals are locking them. Only Labor is on the side of renters, first home buyers and growing families.

Youth crime

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:25): My question is to the Premier. The Youth Junction, which operates intensive programs to direct youth away from offending, has lost funding for three programs and 19 staff in the past 18 months. CEO Blake Edwards said this means 800 young people have lost access to services. Why is the government cutting successful youth diversion programs in the middle of a youth crime crisis?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): I think the member for Gippsland South could appreciate that we will need to perhaps go and check the information he has provided to the house, because as we have seen on previous questions, there is a bit of a pattern of behaviour about the full picture not being told when these case studies are presented to the house. When it comes to supporting whether it is youth diversion programs outside of our youth justice system or programs within our youth justice system, we have a range of programs to prevent crime, because we know that the best approach in terms of dealing with crime is to prevent it. It is to make sure that we are giving kids the best education. It is making sure that there is a pathway for them into our TAFE system.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order on the question of relevance, Speaker, the question was specifically about Youth Junction. They have lost 19 staff in the last 18 months. Can the Premier come back to answering the question?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. If the Leader of the Nationals had been listening, he would have heard that the Premier answered the question at the outset and she is now going on to detail the Allan Labor government's investments into crime prevention programs.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was referring to those programs or those policies because the approach we have taken is to provide more education opportunities for kids here in Victoria. You do not prevent crime by closing TAFEs, like those opposite did. You do not give kids the best chance in life when you cut funding to schools.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, once again on the question of relevance, the question was about youth diversion programs, not TAFE.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. I have got to say the Leader of the Nationals has just shown his ignorance if he does not think that investment in education is part of youth diversion strategy to make sure that kids have every opportunity in life.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question, but she was being relevant when it comes to youth diversion programs.

Jacinta ALLAN: Then there are the range of crime prevention programs, as I was saying, some of which are delivered outside of justice settings that are working with local communities. And I know the Minister for Youth is working with six through the community safety groups. That is just one example of many programs where we also partner with community organisations. Then there are also those programs that sit within the youth justice settings. That is why the youth justice reforms that were contained in legislation that passed through this place last year were both about giving police more powers to run more diversionary activity in our youth justice settings but also about running more programs, particularly for young kids whilst they are in prison serving a period of remand. That is the approach; we will continue to work with local communities. I said at the outset, in answering the Leader of the National Party's question, that we would need to go and check the information he has provided to the house, because there are a range of programs that are run by the government and run by community organisations that are focused on crime prevention, and we will keep up this effort because that is the best way to keep our community safe by preventing crime and also supporting those kids before they head too far down a life that is experiencing criminal behaviour.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:30): Eighty-seven per cent of participants in the Youth Junction programs which have been cut did not reoffend, at a cost of just \$11 per day. Why is preventing youth crime not a priority for this government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:31): I absolutely reject the question that was put by the Leader of the National Party. We are absolutely focused, across all aspects of government, around working on programs and policies that are preventing youth crime. I mentioned the work that goes on in schools, and there is a huge amount of work that goes on in schools. There is the work making sure that we provide pathways for kids to go through our TAFE system. There is the work I detailed earlier in my answer to the substantive question, which clearly the member for Gippsland South was either wilfully not listening to or conveniently ignoring. We are continuing to provide support for a range of programs with community groups within and outside of our justice settings to continue this focus on preventing crime and supporting young people to make the best choices in life.

Ministers statements: rental reform

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:32): The Allan Labor government is committed to making renting fairer and more affordable. While those opposite are walking out on their responsibilities, our government is getting on and working for renters. I am pleased today to provide an update on the progress of our recent rental reforms passed earlier this year through the Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Bill 2024, a bill that was shamefully opposed by those opposite.

November will see the commencement of the notice periods for rent increases and evictions extended from 60 to 90 days, giving renters more certainty to plan for the future. While renters will now have a 90-day notice period, there is one thing that we can be certain of, and that is that the member for Nepean will not be giving the Leader of the Opposition 90 days notice before his eviction. Regulations will also commence shortly to expand the range of factors to be considered by Consumer Affairs Victoria and VCAT when assessing unfair rent increases. Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria has now been operating for nearly three months, and it is achieving real results, seeing thousands of cases

resolved for free in weeks, not months. Our 150th rental reform will be a portable rental bond scheme, commencing early next year. No longer will renters have to be out of pocket for two bonds when they are moving homes, saving them on average \$2500. That is a real cost-of-living measure. While those opposite are so busy dancing with the hard right that they are not focused on what matters most, for a cohesive community it is fundamental –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, for the fulsomeness of information and for the minister to be factual, how much more are renters going to pay in tax with the emergency services tax? I would ask you to ask the minister to stop attacking the opposition.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Nick STAIKOS: Not your best work, Bridget. For a cohesive community it is fundamental –

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister will resume his seat. I am sitting the minister down. That is not an appropriate way to address other members of Parliament.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:34): My question is to the Premier. On 18 June 2024 the Premier told this house that she would ‘strengthen community safety’. The Premier again made this promise on 13 August and 14 August and on 5 February this year. The Premier again said yesterday that it was ‘absolutely clear that we need to do more’. Given the crime crisis in Victoria and the continued increase in violent crime on Victorian streets, when will the Premier stop making empty promises and actually improve community safety?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): The Leader of the Opposition referred to comments I made in June and August of last year and February of this year. Let me tell the Leader of the Opposition what we have been doing over that period of time. Maybe he missed it. I thought he was sitting here in this place, part of the legislative process, but clearly the Leader of the Opposition missed the ban on machetes that we put through the Parliament. The Leader of the Opposition may have missed the post-and-boast laws that passed through the Parliament. The Leader of the Opposition may have missed the electronic monitoring laws that passed through the Parliament.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The reality is that crime statistics are soaring in Victoria. I would ask you to ask her to stop debating, please.

Jacinta ALLAN: On the point of order, Speaker, I was clearly asked what action we had taken over that period of time, and I was simply running through the list of legislative changes we have made, for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, who I thought was here in the Parliament participating. But clearly he was not, so I am happy to continue to answer the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I think I have already mentioned the machete ban, the post-and-boast laws and giving Victoria Police more weapon search powers. I was also detailing the electronic monitoring legislation that we passed through the Parliament. There are also, let us remember, two sets of tougher bail reforms that passed through the Parliament. There has also been the work to give Victoria Police more powers to deal with criminal organisations. In answer to the Leader of the Opposition’s question, we are working incredibly hard to support the work of Victoria Police and to strengthen community safety. The Leader of the Opposition in his question demonstrates – to be honest, I am not sure if it demonstrates wilful ignorance or just not understanding what goes on in this place.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the issue. Clearly I do understand what is happening when we are talking to victims, because the amount of victims here in Victoria is at record levels with the amount of crime happening in this state under your crime crisis.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that the correct way to raise a point of order is not to make a statement to the house. I uphold the point of order on debating, but I will not tolerate points of order being made in an incorrect manner.

Jacinta ALLAN: To assist the Leader of the Opposition with planning his forward program and with reminding him of what I have also said previously, we will continue to strengthen the laws in this state and continue to give Victoria Police powers. I will remind the Leader of the Opposition that in a previous answer I referred to the stronger retail worker protections. Memo: that will be in legislation that will come before this place, just so you do not miss it. I will also –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, not long ago you upheld the point of order that the Premier was debating the question, and she is continuing to do so. She is defying your ruling. I would ask you to ask her to stop debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: There will be more legislation to come, for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, during the course of this parliamentary year as we continue to give Victoria Police more powers, alongside additional resources, to continue their work to keep the community safe.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:40): On 18 June 2024 the Premier told this house that Victoria had one of the lowest rates of youth offending. How much has the rate of youth crime increased since the Premier made that comment?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): In terms of dealing with the challenges around youth offending, that is why we brought these tougher bail laws to the Parliament, and we are seeing more people on remand as a result of that legislative change.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance, it was a very succinct question. How much increase have we had in the youth crime rate? If the Premier does not know that, let us know.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Premier will come back to the question. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is why we are seeing as a result of those changes the number of young people on remand has increased. But again, let us go back to those earlier questions about the best way to support young people being to prevent them going down a path of crime to start with.

Sam Groth: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the question was not about the way the Premier wants to prevent youth crime, it was about the rate of youth crime and the increase.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the direct question that was asked. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: That is why we will continue the work both to give police additional powers and also to strengthen community safety by working through education settings and community organisations to support young people to make better choices in life.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier clearly said across the desk, when I asked her how much it has increased, that she does know the number but then chose not to actually put that figure on the record here in Parliament. If she is not going to answer the questions that are put forward around the youth crime crisis, why do we bother asking questions at all? The community deserve to know.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order. The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Brad Battin: I know you ruled out the point of order, but it was clearly a point of order, Speaker. The Parliament is designed so that the opposition get to ask questions of the government. The government must answer those questions. It is not about here in the chamber; the victims are the ones coming to us that want these answers. If the government choose not to answer when the Premier admits she knows the answer, it is absolutely disrespectful to every single victim and Victorian.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, that is not a point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Brad Rowswell: Speaker, on a further point of order, what I just experienced was another example of what I raised earlier, at the start of question time today. The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to raise a point of order and was doing such, and I, from my position in this place, could not hear what the Leader of the Opposition had to say.

The SPEAKER: Thank you for raising that very important point of order once again, member for Sandringham. I remind members that it goes both ways. I expect members on both sides of the house to be respectful.

Ministers statements: Metro Tunnel

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:44): Later this year the largest transport project in our state's history, the Metro Tunnel, will open up – five brand new stations, turn-up-and-go services, a direct link for Victorians across our great city. It will change the way we move, getting people home safer, sooner and more reliably. But it is not just about how people will travel around our great city and state; it is also about where they live, because transport and housing go hand in hand. This is a project that connects suburbs, unlocks land and clears the way for thousands of new homes for people in places exactly where they want to live – new communities around new train stations, places where, for example, young people could buy their first home or families could live closer to schools and jobs or could stay in the neighbourhoods they love. For example, at Arden, one of the sites of our beautiful new stations, thousands of homes will rise along that beautiful brand new station. Also, through our plans that we released today to connect 50 train and tram zones, 12 of these will be directly connected to the Metro Tunnel. It will mean more services and more homes around stations like Oakleigh, Caulfield, Tottenham, Carnegie, Murrumbeena, Hughesdale and West Footscray. In total, our train and tram zones will create the space for 300,000 more homes over the coming decade.

Only Labor has invested in the Metro Tunnel. Only Labor has backed the Metro Tunnel every single step of the way. There are some who called it a hoax. There are some who said it would be an absolute disaster. There are some who said they would refuse to fund it.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will tell you who it was, Leader of the National Party: it was the Liberal Party and the National Party who refused to back the Metro Tunnel. Well, it is opening later this year. It is real, it is delivering more train services and it is going to support more homes exactly in the right locations.

Constituency questions

Bulleen electorate

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (14:47): (1290) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: why won't the Labor government make the temporary traffic lights at the bottom of King Street, near Hillcroft Drive in Templestowe, a permanent road feature? This is a very dangerous part of King Street in Templestowe, particularly when residents are heading westbound along King Street. You have a very, very dangerous section of traffic. There have been temporary traffic lights installed there for the last number of months. A number of residents have contacted me about the dangerous nature of traffic in that area, particularly with a number of schoolkids and pedestrians that cross there. I seek information from the Labor government and ask why the minister will not make those traffic lights a permanent feature as opposed to what they are now.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:48): (1291) My constituency question is for the Minister for Emergency Services and concerns the satellite CFA station in Lynbrook. Minister, how will the funding towards the satellite CFA station announced in the state budget benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South? The Allan Labor government is committed to supporting the CFA and its volunteers as they work selflessly to protect our communities. I know captain Chris Gomolis and his crew at the Hampton Park fire brigade have been tirelessly advocating and working towards this satellite station for many years, which they have now seen to fruition in funding. The announced funding will help to modernise the station. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them and all our emergency services for their incredible work and dedication, which is on display each and every day, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:49): (1292) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and the information I seek is whether the very expensive brumby-culling program will continue in my electorate of Gippsland East. We have seen a number of cuts and reductions in pest plant and animal control over recent months from Victorian services, and here we have a very expensive program that is operating in my area that nobody in my electorate supports – or very few in my electorate – and the vast majority do not want. I would urge that this brumby-culling program conclude, and the information I seek is whether the minister has plans to end it, as he should.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:50): (1293) My constituency question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and my question is: when will major transport projects that are building bike paths and trails be complete? The infrastructure for cyclists has really taken off in the Thomastown district as we see major transport projects also adding on value with increasing bike paths and connections between bike paths and trails. We are looking at things like the Keon Park level crossing removal, the Childs Road upgrades, M80 upgrades and the Epping Road upgrade that is now underway. It really is important to see how these projects are helping cyclists recreationally and commuters getting around town and going to work.

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:51): (1294) My question is to the Premier. This week I met with residents on Ramsay Avenue in Kew East to hear their concerns following a spate of aggravated burglaries in the street and in the area. In Kew we are seeing hooded offenders armed with machetes kicking down front doors. We have seen a father stabbed in the face, arms and eyes, and every day my office is inundated with CCTV footage showing armed offenders attempting to break into properties. The residents of Ramsay Avenue told me they are living in fear and they need a government that takes their concerns seriously. I have raised community safety with the Premier in Parliament on 6 March,

20 May and most recently on the 28 August, each time following a terrifying home invasion. Yet I have not received a single response on behalf of my local community. Premier, when will you finally take the concerns of my electorate seriously, have the decency to respond and introduce laws that ensure there are consequences for violent offenders in line with community expectations?

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:52): (1295) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. What action is the government taking to address access to train stations across the Kororoit electorate, including Rockbank station? With our community experiencing rapid growth, many commuters are forced to park in surrounding streets due to limited capacity at station car parks. This creates safety concerns, congestion and frustration for many residents, and highlights the need for additional investment to ensure reliable access to public transport. I look forward to getting an answer back.

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:52): (1296) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the government finally fix the dangerous intersections up and down Rathdowne Street which are endangering kids in my electorate – especially kids who go to Carlton Gardens Primary School? Ninety per cent of students at Carlton Gardens Primary School either walk, scoot or cycle to school every day, and this is fantastic. But every morning and afternoon, kids are put in harm's way as they have to cross a range of very dangerous and busy intersections on their way to school. Currently, there are no good bike routes or pedestrian crossings along this route, and the school council is reporting multiple close calls between kids and cars every week, which is really, really frightening. It is a worry because it is only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured or worse. Parents have put forward a proposal for several solutions to local and state Labor governments, such as wombat scramble crossings, longer crossing times at intersections and better bike and pedestrian routes. Now parents and staff want to know when the state Labor government will finally address their concerns.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:53): (1297) My question is for the Minister for Environment. How is the Victorian government supporting e-recycling, sustainability and the circular economy in the Broadmeadows electorate? Embedded batteries are a growing problem contaminating landfill and causing fires. They are found in everyday items like electric toothbrushes, toys, power tools and, sadly, vapes. A lot of people do not know which bins to put them in. It is actually illegal to put them in the normal landfill rubbish bin. They should be recycled. Last week I was really proud to attend the launch of the new Ecocycle and Ecobatt battery-in-device shredding facility in Campbellfield along with Minister Dimopoulos. It was a proud moment to see this world-first technology right here in Broadmeadows – a milestone for Victoria, Australia and indeed the world, and proudly supported by a \$2 million grant from the Labor state government. The machine breaks down the items, separates the batteries and recovers up to 95 per cent of valuable materials like lithium, cobalt and plastics, which can then be reused.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:54): (1298) My question is to the Minister for Education. How will the upgrades at Warringa Park School support outcomes for students in Tarneit with intellectual disabilities? Last week we finished upgrading classrooms at Warringa Park School, a specialist school in Hoppers Crossing that supports students between the ages of five and 18. Since Labor was elected in 2014 we have provided funding for upgrades at every single one of the 82 specialist schools in Victoria. That includes the fantastic Warringa Park School in Hoppers Crossing. Warringa Park provides a community committed to academic excellence and student wellbeing and a safe, flexible and stimulating learning environment. This school plays a pivotal role in the lives of families across

Tarneit and the wider Wyndham community. In the 2022–23 state budget Warringa Park received more than \$14 million to replace relocatable buildings with new permanent classroom facilities. In the Education State we believe every student deserves the best opportunity to thrive.

Martin Cameron: On a point of order, Speaker, I am just following up on some unanswered questions that are taking some time to be answered: question 1985 for the Minister for Mental Health, 2717 for the Minister for Government Services, 2722 for the Minister for Victims, 2721 for the Minister for Health and 2718 for the Minister for Regional Development. I would ask if you could follow them up, please.

Bills

Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (02:56): My speech is so long we had to break for lunch in the middle. I will just take you back to where I was up to. We were talking about the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and evidence heard by the commission from Victoria Police that all the money sloshing around the casino has long been attractive to criminals wanting to turn illicit notes into apparently legitimate funds. One experienced officer explained the standard method in plain terms as follows: bring in dirty money, convert it to chips, play briefly, cash out and walk to the bank with a casino cheque. They said this basic laundering ‘would nearly happen on a daily basis’. That is sworn evidence in the commission’s money laundering chapter of their report. Carded play and electronic payouts directly frustrate this old cash and cheque strategy. The commission also adopted the Bergin inquiry’s findings that Crown facilitated money laundering through its Southbank and Riverbank accounts over many years, with Crown later accepting those conclusions and acknowledging ‘significant deficiencies’ in its anti-money laundering response. That history is exactly why Victoria built a transformation regime and tougher compliance settings. Here we find ourselves with Labor delaying those cash and identity rules until the end of 2027.

Beyond the casino we have a national warning. The New South Wales Crime Commission concluded in 2022 that criminals funnel billions of dollars of dirty cash through poker machines in pubs and clubs, calling poker machines ‘one of the last remaining safe havens’ for cleaning cash. Its top recommendation: mandatory cashless gaming with enhanced data and identification. Why? Because traceability – who played, when and how much – breaks the business model of criminal cash. The principle is identical for a casino floor. Postponing carded play and electronic payout rules until 2027 means postponing the best practice anti-money laundering response that Australian crime agencies themselves have urged.

Anti-money laundering is not an abstract compliance box. It is about choking off the revenue streams of organised crime, drug trafficking, human exploitation and fraud. AUSTRAC’s actions and crime commission findings show the sector has been a recurring target. The community expectation after the royal commission was that Victoria would take the shortest road to a traceable, ID-verified gambling environment. This bill takes the long road, and every extra month keeps the door open for criminal cash.

The Greens support what is good in this bill. We support stronger enforcement against Crown and its corporate associates. The corporate associate framework closes a well-known accountability gap by allowing discipline throughout the chain. Letters of censure and fines up to \$1 million for associated companies that do not cooperate or notify changes help the regulator keep pressure on associates, not just frontline licence-holders. We support sharper sanctions for ignoring transformation plan directions. The added \$1 million per day is the kind of lever the regulator needs to ensure reform deadlines are real and not optional. We support training and supervision standards for table games and authority to limit table occupancy. These are practical measures that improve oversight and reduce

risk for staff and patrons, but we cannot accept the grievous and industry-friendly shortcomings of this bill, which kicks core harm-reduction measures out to 2027.

The costs of waiting are borne by the same families we hear from in electorate offices – parents facing rent arrears because a partner's losses spiked, retirees burning through savings, kids going without. Carded play, mandatory limits and daily cash and payout controls are not abstract reforms, they are seat belts, and we would never vote to delay seat belts for two years after we agreed that they save lives. I suspect many of the members in the chamber today have met families, have met people who have lost far too much money at the casino or on the pokies – families whose suffering could have been prevented if these measures had been instituted last year or five years ago. Delaying these measures another two years means that we will be seeing more families, more individuals who are suffering because of the failure to institute these simple and not overly onerous recommendations.

What we say to the government is: keep the strong parts of the bill; drop the delay. Crown has been given four years notice to get things in place. So let us put people first. Let us deliver the carded play with precommitment reforms that Victoria was promised. Deliver it on time, and give the regulator the teeth and timelines it needs to protect the community.

The Greens oppose the bill in its current form and will be looking at it further over the break. We look forward to hearing from the government – you never know – that they may decide to dispense with the delay.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:02): I too rise to speak on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This bill, yet again, builds upon our government's efforts to make gaming in Victoria safer and more responsible for all Victorians. I have had the chance to speak quite a lot about these sorts of reforms in this place over the last couple of years, and what we know is that when it comes to gambling losses, it is communities like mine in the western suburbs – suburbs that suffer from systemic economic disadvantage generation upon generation – that end up sustaining the greatest losses, sadly. We know that through the data and the statistics that are collected. It is communities like mine that are some of the hardest hit, and they lose hundreds of millions of dollars each and every single year, and that is really into poker machines.

In the last financial year, Victorians collectively lost over \$7.3 billion to all different types of gambling. More than half of this was through pokie machines and of course at the casino. The Crown Casino alone accounted for \$957 million in gambling losses over this period. It does not please me to say at all that the City of Brimbank, which I represent, tops the list when it comes to gambling losses, accounting for more than \$175 million in losses. That is an appalling amount of money. As I said, suburbs and neighbourhoods, streets with some of the most economically disadvantaged people here in Victoria – \$170 million a year in losses. In the July that has just passed, Brimbank lost – this is just July – \$16.5 million in just one month. Can you believe that? \$16.5 million in one month.

As someone who likes to build stuff in their electorate – and we need to build a lot of stuff – I think about what that \$16.5 million could have gone towards, and I can tell you: a hell of a lot of things. This is something that greatly concerns me and my community as a local member, and I applaud the advocacy of Brimbank City Council in sticking up for locals and being a champion of gambling reform. When I was chairing the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee when we held our inquiry into the gambling and liquor regulations, I recall having the public hearings and hearing from so many services and operators, people on the front line that are having to counsel and support problem gamblers, and the stories that they can tell you about what is happening with these families, with gambling addiction at the centre of it, are absolutely appalling. It is a disgusting scourge on our local communities.

I went ahead and visited with I think the Minister for Mental Health and, at one stage, gambling and liquor regulation on another occasion in Sunshine, meeting with the services that deal locally with folks in Brimbank and in the greater western suburbs that are struggling with gambling addictions and

provide that kind of support to those locals and also, most importantly, to their families. As I said, this is a scourge on our local community, and the devastation that the family unit suffers when one of their loved ones has a gambling problem or is a gambling addict is absolutely appalling – and it is a lifelong addiction. These are real issues, and to no-one's surprise, these issues are multifaceted and involve social, economic and mental issues.

We have known that we need major changes in our gaming industry for a long time, especially when it comes to Crown Casino. It is why our government committed to the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and then accepted and agreed to deliver on all 33 recommendations. It is why we committed to cleaning up our pokies venues, including uniform closing periods, mandatory precommitment and slowing the spin rates of many new gaming machines.

It should be clear that while we accept – and I do accept; I have talked here in this place about how my Nanna Jean, who has been passed away now almost the past decade, loved going and having a punt on the pokies. She loved it. She used to go down to the local bowling club on pension day. She was not a very wealthy lady whatsoever. She was also deaf; she went deaf at 50, which was incredibly isolating for her. But she loved the pokies, and I think she used to bet 5-cent pieces that would go in. This woman had nothing, but with the cheap meal she would go down, and she enjoyed doing that. It was part of her social interaction as she struggled with going deaf at 50.

But I will say that it is really important to minimise the risk of vulnerable people – because it is not all people – taking it too far and losing hundreds, if not thousands or even tens of thousands, of dollars on a night at the pokies. If left unfettered, irresponsible gambling can destroy lives, and that is something I have heard directly from, as I have said, many of the agencies that service my community – and there are many, many services across Melbourne's west, because some of the hardest hit parts in Victoria are in our local neighbourhoods.

Today's bill in particular relates to Crown Casino. It builds upon that commitment to implementing those 33 recommendations. We have made sure that Crown obeys some very, very strict gambling settings – and I think it should have always been this way – including mandatory carded play on all EGMs and, as of this year, electronic tables. It is interesting, because I do not think I have ever set foot inside the gambling component of Crown Casino, so I am not quite sure what an electronic table consists of or would even look like. When I think of gambling, it is always the pokie machines, because Nanna used to like us to go down there and spend time with her, but she would be playing on the machines.

But we have implemented binding precommitment limits on all EGMs at Crown Casino so that players can, most importantly, manage their gambling and avoid taking it too far. We have reduced load limits from \$2000 to \$1000 at the casino so that players cannot just load up a large amount of money at once into one machine. We have also limited the amount of hours a person can play – I always find this absolutely extraordinary, how long some people can sit at these machines. We have limited the amount of hours without a break to 3 hours – that is still a really long time. You think about sitting on your phone for 3 hours – that is a really long time. That is longer than they are making Hollywood movies nowadays. I think the last 3-hour movie that I watched was probably on the weekend with the kids, and that was *The Lord of the Rings*. The breaks are now at 3 hours, and there are no more than 12 hours in a day and no more than 36 hours in a week.

What this bill does is build upon the changes that we have made. It also goes ahead and strengthens them. The bill does so by empowering the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission with stronger watchdog powers to, really importantly, hold Crown Casino to account. The bill will increase penalties for noncompliance with a direction from the regulator. Currently that penalty is a one-off \$10,000 fine, but these changes mean it will now be a daily penalty of \$1 million until compliance is achieved, and I think that is a much clearer, much more realistic penalty for noncompliance. What we are doing through this penalty – the change in penalty units and the amount of money that Crown can be hit with – is we are making it very, very clear that when it comes to implementing these changes,

Crown cannot drag its feet. This bill is going to go further than just regulating Crown Casino itself, it is going to extend the regulator's scope to include all of Crown's corporate associates.

This is a really important bill. I have talked about the amount of harm that gambling causes just in Brimbank alone, and I represent Hobsons Bay, Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Wyndham. I have four of the best or worst LGAs in Melbourne's west, and each one of those LGAs has gambling losses in the millions – it just is absolutely extraordinary, as I have said. The Laverton electorate takes in some of the most vulnerable suburbs here in Victoria. 2017 was the last time that we lifted the cap in relation to the maximum number of entities that a single club operator can hold, and I imagine there will be a lot of clubs and a lot of RSLs and venues who want to phase out gambling machines but cannot afford to do so, and we do want to see that. I commend the bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:13): I rise to make a contribution to the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and this is a bill that the opposition are not opposing. I want to begin my contribution with a little bit of history. This bill deals with casinos and gaming generally, and I am going to just start with the history around the casino, because history was made on 30 June 1994, when Melbourne first got a casino. It was at the World Trade Centre, and I was quite aware of it because it was near where I was working and it was a big deal for Melbourne at that time. They moved to the permanent location a few years later, on 8 May 1997, and the casino now is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with the exception of Christmas Day, Good Friday and Anzac Day, when it closes between 4 am and 12 pm. Crown itself, if we are still on the casino, has really established itself as one of the major tourist destinations in Melbourne. It is the single biggest employer, having some 13,000 employees, and that is a lot of people to actually try and manage, making sure you do the right thing by each of them. The turnover is about \$2 billion, which is itself really enormous, and they spend about \$417 million each year on about 1900 suppliers, and a lot of those would be local suppliers in and around Melbourne and Victoria.

The poker machines are a little bit different. Joan Kirner introduced gambling in hotels and clubs in 1991, and at that time – and you may remember, Acting Speaker O'Keeffe – the poker machines and gambling, poker machines particularly, were always over the river, always in New South Wales. There were so many clubs that established themselves on the New South Wales side of the Murray River as poker machine destinations, and people from Victoria would flock there. If they wanted to gamble, the big place to go was Wrest Point casino in Tasmania, at Sandy Bay in Hobart.

With regard to the poker machines, they were set up with a bit of a duopoly, and it has not always been smooth sailing. The government did have a look at how to get rid of this duopoly at one point, and they actually had what we could call a fire sale of poker machine licences. I have got to refer to an article in the *Australian Financial Review* in 2011, from 30 June, saying:

The state poker machine licence auction conducted by the previous Labor government was one of the "greatest financial debacles in Victoria's history" ...

That was what former Premier Ted Baillieu said.

Victoria missed out on \$3 billion because of how the sale was structured, a report into the auction of 27,500 pokies in May last year by Auditor-General Des Pearson says.

It was tabled in Parliament.

Mr Pearson said the auction delivered \$980 million to the state, but he found the market value was \$3.7 billion to \$4.5 billion.

So they missed out, because of their mismanagement, on \$3 billion. Also with the poker machines, there has been a fair bit of gambling harm, and there have been changes on the way, having removed ATMs from gambling venues. This is something that the member for Malvern, when he was the responsible minister, pursued. There was also the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which was set up. It is exceptionally disappointing to hear that was given the kibosh fairly recently, particularly in light of comments made on the other side of the house during this debate and also during

the procedural debate that followed, looking at the adjournment motion here, where there were issues regarding gambling harm, which seemed to be of such importance to those in the government. But none of them have actually lobbied the government to say, ‘You should not have abolished the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.’ It is with the greatest hypocrisy that those opposite view this gambling harm.

We had the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence in 2021, and the commission found some terrible cases of misconduct, deeming Crown unsuitable to hold a casino licence due to money laundering, criminal associations, tax evasion and illegal gambling activities. There were 33 recommendations carried out in and around mandatory carded play, limits on cash deposits and daily withdrawals.

This bill we have before us looks at both the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. I am going to start with the Casino Control Act. The aim here is for greater transparency in the regulation of the gaming industry. There are a couple of different areas that it covers – provisions, carded play. Crown have adapted all their electronic gaming machines – they have done the right thing and adapted to the requirements under the recommendations – and for electronic gaming tables. The gaming tables are where you sit and you play blackjack or roulette against a machine, not in the old-fashioned way, where you would have other people around and a croupier. It is much more difficult to implement the recommendations and the changes required for that component. Crown have advised that they need time. The new technology that they are investing in is something about \$40 million, which is quite significant. We need to be mindful of the fact that technology changes fairly rapidly, and to bring this technology into the final stages of development and then do the appropriate testing to make sure that everything is up to speed takes a bit of time. This is why in this bill there is an extension of two years. Crown have advised that they will not meet the deadline, so the government have agreed that they will extend it by two years to 1 December 2027, rather than 1 December in a few months. As I have said, this is dealt with under the section on cashless gaming and mandatory carded play.

There are also some other provisions around cashless banking and payments and the provisions around how gaming accounts can be credited, including a cash deposit of up to \$1000 each day, electronic funds transfers from a bank in the same name as a gaming account and transfers from a deposit account.

There are a few changes here that are trying to bring greater transparency and protect those that are gambling with some measures against harm. There are four new areas of power that have been added for creating regulations on carded play requirements: procedures for verifying a person’s identity before allowing them to play; prohibiting a person from using a player’s card that is not in their name – you could imagine that it is probably quite easy to just say, ‘Hey, grab my card,’ but this is making sure that it is above board, dinky-di, that you are the person that has that card; the training and supervision requirements for casino employees in relation to the playing of table games; and restricting the number of people able to play a table game at the casino.

Looking at the Gambling Regulation Act, there is a change of definitions here. The most important provisions here are about increasing gaming machine entitlements. The proposal is for the gaming machine entitlements to increase from 840 to 1260. What has happened over the course of the couple of decades when we have had these machines is a number of smaller clubs, not pubs, had a number of licences. They have found it to be not profitable for them. It is not worth their while, and it has been very difficult for them to offload them, so they kind of feel like they have been a little bit lumbered. But changing this will allow them to exit the pokies market, and the bigger clubs will be able to purchase the machines with this new entitlement cap. So this change is a positive step as far as a lot of smaller venues are concerned that did lock into that 20-year loan for the electronic gaming machine licences that they purchased that are not profitable any longer. As I have mentioned, it has been very difficult for these clubs to onsell these licences because the big players were at capacity. If the big players now have additional capacity, there is that opportunity for that movement to happen. This increase from 840 to 1260 will help resolve that.

In terms of stakeholder feedback, the AHA, Australian Hotels Association, and CCV, Community Clubs Victoria, support this bill and particularly the extension of two years for Crown. It cannot be overestimated, the value that Crown brings to Victoria in terms of tourism. People do not just go there to gamble; there is that whole entertainment complex around it. You only have to go there in the evenings to see how busy it is. People are at the restaurants, at the fast-food eateries and at the movies. There are lots of shows. There is a lot that happens in that precinct, and it needs to be supported.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (15:23): I rise today to contribute on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, and I acknowledge the previous contributions from everyone that has had their go so far. I am pleased that the opposition are not opposing this bill.

As with every gambling amendment that I have spoken on, I have always acknowledged that I am a gambler, and I have gambled on many, many things throughout my time. I have always been a gambler and probably will be for the rest of my life. I am sure the bookies and the TAB will be very happy with that, let me tell you, let alone my mates at the football club and every other club that I bet on. I am not a big gambler on pokies, though. Most times if I play the pokies, it is only because I want to have another drink. They are there just to amuse me while I am drinking sometimes. I do not do it very often. But it is good. I always stay within my limits, let me say, and I always do it just in fun. I do not believe I have an addiction – I hope I do not. But of course it is not always the way with some people, and we have certainly got to protect many, many people in our community.

I should say, in the local government area of Melton I think the gambling losses amounted to about \$82 million in the previous financial year compared to the one before, which was about \$51 million. So there has been a massive increase in gambling losses in the Melton LGA each year, but in particular over the last year. It is probably just an indication of people becoming quite desperate with the cost of living and trying to gamble their way out of trouble, which never, ever works, unfortunately.

It is not just the financial issues with gambling but also the issue of the addiction, which leads to mental stress, family issues and breakdown of families and even leads to, unfortunately, some people either threatening to take or being successful in taking their lives. I think from the period of 2009 to 2016, 4.2 per cent of suicides were linked directly to gambling, which was about 184 cases that were directly linked to gambling causes.

It is ironic that yesterday we had Racing Victoria in here and a couple of beautiful horses, beautiful thoroughbreds, one that had won the Caulfield Cup and another one that had won the Melbourne Cup – magnificent animals – and then after that there was an event in the south library talking about the launch of the Spring Racing Carnival. I know many members that are in here were there yesterday enjoying themselves, trying to get a tip for the Spring Racing Carnival. We heard from that – it is one of the great events here in Victoria – it delivers an economic windfall of about \$3.1 billion to the state. There are 25,000 jobs within the racing industry. It is an important industry and it is an important event, the Spring Racing Carnival. It is world renowned. Again, these are some of the benefits of gambling, but also we have got to be cautious about the detriments of gambling and try to protect people from becoming addicted.

The Allan Labor government has led the nation in casino reform and tackling gambling harm. We established the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, and we are delivering on all of the 33 recommendations handed down by that royal commission. The Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 amends the Casino Control Act 1991 to support the implementation of recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence and to ensure that our Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission has the appropriate powers it needs to hold Crown Melbourne to account, and clearly it needs to be held to account. They have made a few errors through the way, and surely they need to be accountable for some of the things that were going on down there.

This bill also amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to support balanced gaming machine ownership across the state and to make it easier for community clubs that want to step back from the pokies business to do so. There are many, many of those clubs that thought that the pokies were going to be the greatest things for them in regard to financial benefit, and in some cases it has not worked out, in particular for some of our local sports clubs that were relying on the revenue from gaming machines. It just has not worked out for them in some cases, and they have certainly stepped back from that. I know that a number of those clubs, in particular football clubs and golf clubs, have really moved away from the gaming machines.

Following the royal commission, the government established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission as a regulator, and that was focused solely on the gambling industry. Carded play has been in place at Crown since the end of 2023 on all electronic gaming machines and will be extended to electronic table games this year. Gaming areas in pubs and clubs are legally required to close between the hours of 4 am and 10 am, which is terrific. I have raised this in my area of Melton – at some of the clubs in Melton where they were open basically 24 hours. I could see no reason why someone would be in a gaming venue at 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the morning unless they had an addiction to gambling. I questioned it when some licences were extended or some hours of operations were extended at some of the clubs throughout the Melton area in regard to being open virtually throughout the night, so I am pleased to say that pubs and clubs are legally required to close between 4 am and 10 am. This limits the amount of time a person can spend gambling, and that is hopefully reducing the potential for addiction and the great losses of money.

Some of the other things that we have done: we have reduced load-up limits and we have limited EFTPOS cash withdrawals to \$500 per card for every 24-hour period.

At Crown Casino we have limited how many hours a person can play, with no more than 3 hours of continuous play without a break. I think it is important to break the cycle by not being in there for hour after hour after hour, so people have to have a break after 3 hours, even though 3 hours seems like a long time. There is no more than 12 hours play within a 24-hour period and no more than 36 hours during a seven-day period, and this again is primarily about protecting people in regard to gambling and gambling addiction and their being captured by those, whether it be the machines or whether it be the tables. But certainly the machines are addictive – there is no doubt about that. The technology is addictive.

Crown Melbourne is working towards delivering its commitments under the Melbourne transformation plan, a program of over 100 initiatives focusing on improved compliance, operations, customer experience, gambling harm and investment over the coming years. To incentivise Crown Melbourne to continue its transformation and deter against any delays, the bill ensures that noncompliance with a direction issued by the regulator that relates to the Melbourne transformation plan can be met with specific and strong disciplinary action in the form of an additional fine not exceeding \$1 million for every day of noncompliance.

I do want to go to a couple of things that the member for Brunswick raised, and they are primarily on his focus on anti-money-laundering aspects. I have got to say that Crown must comply with the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006, which is enforced by AUSTRAC. There is already an existing limit of \$1000 on the amount of cash the casino operator may pay to a person in a single transaction. Amounts above this must be paid by EFT or cheque, and the casino operator can make multiple payments of up to \$1000 to a person in a day. Of course there has been mandatory carded play on EGMs – pokies – at Crown since 2023. We have reduced the load-up limit, as I have previously said, which was lowered from \$2000 to \$1000. That was done back in 2023, and again that reduces the amount of cash that can be inserted into a gaming machine. Single-patron bank accounts is another issue that has been raised. This is an important bill. It is about protecting people. I commend the bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:33): I rise to speak on the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. It is a bit back to the future for me, having dealt with a lot of the legislation with respect to gaming and gambling over the last couple of years as the previous shadow minister, and I guess it highlights an issue that is sometimes lost by those who wish to see gambling curtailed or removed from our society. I understand the harms that come from gambling and casinos – there is no question that there are harms – but I also note that in the couple of years that I had the portfolio there was a lot of legislation with respect to the casino but also gambling and electronic gaming machines more broadly. That was partly as a result of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, but it also highlights that there is a lot of regulation and that this is a heavily regulated sector with a number of agencies oversighting different levels and different parts of the sector, and this is just one further part of it.

Previous speakers have all mentioned the royal commission, and it is important to remind the house that the government at the time had to be dragged kicking and screaming to actually take action on the nefarious activities that had previously been going on at Crown. Indeed they only came to light because of a royal commission in New South Wales, and my predecessor in the role, the then member for Euroa, was very strong in raising concerns that the government and particularly the then regulator, the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, had been asleep at the wheel. That led to significant reforms that the government implemented to address the concerns at Crown.

What I have always objected to is that some of that regulation that was brought in to, quite rightly, bring Crown onto a tighter leash and ensure that it was doing the right thing – removing criminal activity, reducing gambling harm, all of the issues that we all support – was unnecessarily extended to smaller operators, particularly the clubs and pubs, when they had done nothing wrong and when there was no evidence in some circumstances that particularly the money laundering and other activity was happening in clubs or pubs. So I was pleased that the legislation that passed a few months ago was far more reasonable than was originally intended when it came to mandatory carded play, because we know that our pubs and clubs, particularly in our regional areas, are really important parts of our communities. They provide employment, they provide a social outlet for people and they provide somewhere warm and welcoming for many vulnerable people, the elderly and the disadvantaged, who enjoy the company going there. They sometimes go and play the pokies. Personally, I do not understand that; it is not something that I find interesting. I really quite dislike them, which made it an interesting issue being the shadow minister. But I also take the view that these machines are legal, they are heavily regulated and people are entitled to go and enjoy them if they choose to do so.

With respect to the legislation specifically that we are dealing with today, I do have a little bit of a desire to say 'I told you so' on some of this. The government at the time a couple of years ago was implementing the royal commission's recommendation faithfully to introduce carded play not only on electronic gaming machines but also on table games. I had discussions, obviously, with the government at the time and also with the casino. I actually went to the casino at the time, and they gave me a tour around and an overview of how they were to implement the new legislation. I did ask the question: are you going to be able to deliver the technology to have carded play on table games by the December 2025 deadline? And the answer was, 'It'll be tight because it doesn't exist anywhere in the world, but we can do so.' I feel I was a little sceptical at the time. Again, I am not an expert, certainly, in gaming technology, but it did seem to be that it would be a very difficult task to implement such a raft of recommendations and regulation, and it was probably no great surprise to me when we got called in for a briefing a couple of weeks ago with the member for Ovens Valley, highlighting that this legislation was being introduced to extend the deadline by another two years. We do not see this as a sweetheart deal for Crown; we see the pragmatic reality of it. But it is a little bit amusing in some respects that this was seen to be very achievable two years ago. We were assured that it would be, and it has turned out not to be the case. We are dealing with, as I understand it, pretty much a world first in terms of the technology that is being used, and so we understand that there needs to be some flexibility in it.

I think it is also important that the government gets this right, because we know how big the casino is. It is not just a gambling operation, it is an entertainment venue and a significant attractor for the city of Melbourne, whether it is people coming in specifically to play, the high rollers or others, or more particularly those who come to the city for our events, for our activities, for tourism, for holidays and then choose to go to Crown for the food, the entertainment, the gambling or whatever it might be. We need to make sure, firstly, that the casino operator is fit and proper and that they are doing the right thing and that crime and organised crime in particular are minimised within and around the casino precinct but also that we are protecting it as a venue and as a major tourism attraction for the city and for indeed the state.

I note also the legislation makes a change to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, which increases the cap on gaming machine entitlements for clubs. To be honest, I am a little surprised there has not been more opposition to that publicly – maybe it is still to come. That is largely about the bigger club operators – not single venues, but operators that have multiple venues. Currently the cap is 840 EGMs, and the legislation increases this to 1260. Whether that is necessary or appropriate remains to be seen, but I do know there are many clubs around the state who have a small number of machines who are struggling and are not really able to afford them. The machines are not the goldmine they once were, that is for sure, particularly for clubs. Some clubs are in a situation where they really would like to offload them, but there are not too many alternatives to sell them to. The lifting of the cap will give some of those bigger operators the opportunity to pick up some of those entitlements, which is a benefit for the community if it means that smaller clubs – whether they are bowls clubs, golf clubs, tennis clubs, whatever they might be – will actually have the opportunity to get out.

I think there is a case for us providing some sort of secondary opportunity at some stage to actually reduce the number of EGMs across the state and, if there is demand for it, to have some sort of surrender scheme available. I know we had that. Mr Mulholland in the other place ran a very strong campaign with respect to the Glenroy RSL, which had purchased new entitlements but was then knocked back ultimately by the Supreme Court from actually expanding and installing those entitlements, but the state was still forcing them to pay for them. Eventually the minister agreed that there would be a surrender scheme for those circumstances. It took a while, but it was good work by Mr Mulholland and certainly is one that needs to be considered more broadly. We will certainly see. Let us hope this two-year extension allows the technology to develop and the casino can continue to implement the gambling harm reduction measures that are required.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (15:43): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Budget papers 2025–26

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this house takes note of the 2025–26 budget papers.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:43): I was just looking over *Hansard* from the last time I got to speak on the budget, and honestly, I do not think the 7 minutes that I have left is enough to cover everything given what I have already spoken on. I will have to speak even quicker than I normally do. But the main theme of it was regional discrimination. This is something that we at the Nationals talk about often. With a quarter of the state's population living outside of the capital city, we are of the strong belief that at least a quarter of infrastructure funding at a bare minimum should be invested in the regions given that everything the city relies on comes from us. From the Mallee, along the river,

on the Murray; the Wimmera; Gippsland – everything that the city uses comes from us. We are talking about food and fibre. Down in the Latrobe Valley it is power, and soon, when this government gets its way, the power will come from up in the north-west as well.

Without regional Victoria this state would grind to a halt. We would be naked, sober and hungry. I know I say that all the time, but like I just said, naked because we grow the cotton and we grow the wool for the fibres on your back, sober because we grow the grapes for the wine and we grow barley and hops to make beer and hungry because it is obviously us growing the food in commercial quantities to feed not just the state but the entire world.

But the one thing that has been noted in this budget and is brought up to me most often is how we got into this state of debt, and by that I mean interest repayments of \$1.2 million per hour. The answer is simple – we know what it is: because Labor cannot manage money. Imagine what we could do in my electorate of Mildura in a day, or in a week. In a day we could fill the potholes and fix the shoulders of the roads that are crumbling pretty safely, on the state roads at least. In a week we could fix all of the Buloke Shire Council roads that were destroyed in floods back in 2022.

I mentioned this last sitting week in this place. Buloke Shire Council are very small in terms of resources but large in terms of geography. They are still waiting on flood recovery funding to the tune of about \$60 million so they can actually rebuild some of those roads or just, at a bare minimum, patch them up. We know that the only way to get our food and fibre to port or to market is on the roads, because the rail infrastructure funding that has gone into the city and into big holes under the city has left the Murray Basin rail project wanting such that we have an inefficient rail freight service that growers just (a) cannot afford to use because it is too inefficient, with only three trains per week. So they have to go on trucks.

We know that the trucks are getting bigger. We have family growers now, such as Lamattina, for example, that grow carrots in my electorate, grow carrots in the member for Lowan's electorate and grow carrots up in Queensland even so they can do it all year round because they are a supplier for Coles and Woolworths. As a family farm enterprise, they have to run B-quads to be able to get their carrots to market – B-quads on those little roads. The shoulders on them are literally crumbling. Like I have said, there are specifications for what the drop-off needs to be before it triggers repair. Well, I can tell you that those B-quads are not getting off the road, which in some cases is less than 3 metres wide. So they are family vehicles that need to leave the road with that kind of drop-off, and that is simply dangerous. This regional discrimination that we talk about is not just a talking point, it is not just a media release; it is dangerous, and it is costing lives.

We talk about that in terms of health care as well. That \$1.2 million per hour in interest repayments that we are repaying in state debt: give me a month of those interest repayments alone, just a month, and we could improve the Mildura hospital – we could build a new hospital in a month with those interest repayments alone. We desperately need to, because, like I said, the Mildura Base Public Hospital has 130 beds for a catchment of 75,000 people, and we are talking in three states. I have had this discussion with the Minister for Health. People are moving to New South Wales, as much as this government does not want to acknowledge it. We can see it in border communities. Subdivisions are going on just over the river so people can build there, because they can actually build a house in New South Wales pretty easily; they can subdivide, and developers are treated with respect. But they are still using the infrastructure on our side, including that hospital, in fact all the way from Broken Hill and all the way from the Riverland in South Australia. Those 130 beds to service our catchment – that is one bed for every 577 people, and we wonder why there is a health crisis.

When we say that Labor cannot manage money, again, it is not just a talking point; it is actually dangerous, and it is costing lives.

We have stories every day about how it is costing lives in health care, in infrastructure funding, in roads recovery funding and in support for those that grow our food and fibre in this state. This budget

should have rewarded regional Victoria for the contribution they make, not just to your plate in the city but to the overall state's GDP, and it has not. It has punished regional Victoria with higher debt, higher taxes and nothing to show for it. The Allan Labor government has once again proven that it governs just for the inner suburbs and marginal seats, but the Nationals will keep fighting. This budget fails regional Victoria, it fails fairness, it fails all of the regions throughout Victoria, and it is simply because we know that Labor cannot manage money.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (15:51): I am very pleased to speak to the 2025–26 Victorian budget, which builds on previous budget investments, focuses on what matters most and once again delivers important initiatives for the Kalkallo electorate. The Kalkallo electorate continues to be one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria, with diverse residents of all stages of life. And as it grows, the community relies on ongoing investment in services and infrastructure.

The health of every Victorian remains one of the highest priorities for our government. That is why we are investing over \$600 million to open and operate community hospitals across the state. This includes the Craigieburn Community Hospital, which provides local care as well as alleviating the pressure on nearby major hospitals, such as the Northern Hospital in Epping. It has been really terrific to visit the hospital as services have been introduced, with pharmacy, dialysis and dental services underway for some time. It is now expanding to include paediatric development and feeding clinics, as well as antenatal and preterm birth care. In the coming months we will see more services, such as lung cancer screening and a specialist insulin pump clinic. This is a really important addition to our local community, and I look forward to even more services progressively rolling out. The budget also provides funding to continue operating urgent health clinics, ensuring that the Craigieburn urgent care clinic can keep delivering vital services for Craigieburn and the wider community. With extended hours, bulk billing and no appointment needed, these clinics are terrific for those who need urgent care but not an emergency response, again, freeing up our emergency departments and providing care close to home.

As we all know, with a growing population, we need to provide more transport options to keep our community moving. This budget delivers funding via the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund to provide an increase in the operating hours of bus routes 525, 528, 529, 533, 537 and 390, and I look forward to these uplifts commencing soon. An additional \$4.7 million is also allocated to Beveridge route 511 to increase the frequency and reroute that service to Craigieburn station. Rail services will also improve locally, including extra am and pm services each weekday from Wallan and Donnybrook to the CBD and back, slashing wait times from 40 minutes to 20 minutes, as well as additional services on the Craigieburn line. In partnership with the federal government, Mitchell shire will also see an important upgrade to Old Sydney Road which will provide an alternate route out of Beveridge.

When I am talking to residents locally, what comes through loud and clear is that cost-of-living relief really matters. It is not just people in Kalkallo who feel this way, and that is why this budget builds on a range of statewide initiatives to deliver real cost-of-living relief to families. Free public transport for under-18s from January 2026 will significantly assist families, as will the free public transport for seniors on weekends, increasing the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to \$400 for all eligible primary and secondary students in all Victorian schools, continuing free admission for children under 16 to Melbourne Zoo, Healesville Sanctuary, Kyabram Fauna Park and Werribee Open Range Zoo, the \$100 power saving bonus vouchers for eligible concession card households and the expansion of the community pharmacy program so that pharmacists can treat more conditions without the need for people to see a GP for a prescription. Common conditions include allergies, asthma, ear infections, minor wound care and type 2 diabetes. They are being added to what was available during the pilot, such as resupply of the contraceptive pill, UTI treatments and access to travel health advice and vaccinations.

As Minister for Community Sport, I know that sport plays a vital role in physical health, mental wellbeing and community connection. It is important to many Victorians, including those in Kalkallo, but we need to make sure that cost is not a barrier to that participation.

That is why this government introduced the Get Active Kids voucher program in 2020, and that is why programs to support participation are even more important in this current cost-of-living crisis that is faced by families. That is why this budget provides \$20.3 million over two years to continue community sport and active recreation programs, including the Get Active Kids voucher program. New funding of \$15 million will enable the program to be delivered for a further two years. This is an incredibly popular program where eligible families are able to apply for vouchers of up to \$200 per child over two rounds, with the first opening in October, followed by another round in February 2026. The program is incredibly popular in the Hume LGA, including in Kalkallo, and I am delighted that this program not only is continuing but will add another 65,000 vouchers to the almost 190,000 vouchers already provided.

There is also \$20 million in this budget for community sport and active recreation infrastructure, including up to \$400,000 for a new sports and community pavilion at Dwyer Street reserve, in the rapidly growing part of Kalkallo, and up to \$500,000 to upgrade the Beveridge recreation reserve, which is needing to service more and more residents every year and for another round of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund, which I encourage the Mitchell and Hume LGAs to submit applications for.

Nothing highlights a cost-of-living crisis like the need for food relief, and while no-one in our community should go hungry, demand for these services remains very high. As the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, I am proud of the additional \$18 million that this budget invests in strengthening food security. We are doubling support for the community food relief program to support more regional and local organisations, including neighbourhood houses, to provide food relief to those who need it most. We are also investing \$5.1 million over four years to expand the Good Money program delivered by Good Shepherd. This critical program provides Victorians facing significant financial stress with access to no-interest loans for a range of essentials, such as furniture, laptops, medical expenses and housing-related expenses such as rental bonds, as well as budgeting advice and referrals to other supports. I recently joined the member for Greenvale at the new Good Money storefront in Craigieburn, made possible by this funding, and I know these services will make a really important difference to our community once it opens later this year.

As the Minister for Agriculture I am pleased that the budget is backing Victoria's \$20 billion agriculture sector, with an investment of \$35.6 million towards protecting our fresh produce and livestock. Supporting the industry benefits every Victorian, ensuring we can continue to enjoy the high-quality produce we know and love.

I am delighted that this year's budget provides for my local community. We are continuing to deliver for local Victorians both in my electorate of Kalkallo and across my portfolio. As I mentioned at the start of my contribution, it is important that we continue to deliver for what is one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria. There are many diverse people of all stages of life, and the infrastructure that we are providing ensures that their needs are met and it is done so in a timely manner.

We have continued to open schools over the past 10 years – next year I might be opening schools 11, 12 and 13. So we are recognising that there is significant growth, and we are making sure that the facilities are provided so that people can access education nice and close to home. Alongside those schools, we have also got the adjacent kindergartens being built. Sometimes they are in the community centres that we fund with local councils, which provide not only the kindergarten services but also the maternal and child health services that council deliver. I think we are up to about six to eight of those that we have opened in the last 10 years. They have been incredibly important for the local community, which does have a lot of babies being born every month – we are taking care of that. But also that we

now have the adjacent kindergartens to the schools is really good. We recently opened one this year that was next to Wallan Secondary school, and that sits really nicely on that site.

I am confident that we are continuing to deliver what is needed when it is needed. That is also why we have the progressive rollout of services in the Craigieburn hospital, and I was there just last week seeing people who were really very pleased to be able to access health care nice and close to home. This frees up services at the Northern Hospital but also means that they have had time in their day saved because they can access it close to home. I commend the budget to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Housing

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

That this house affirms the importance of housing to Victorians and supports the Allan Labor government's target of 800,000 homes over 10 years, the reforms underpinning it and the skilled workforce that will deliver it.

John LISTER (Werribee) (16:01): Thank you for your patience, as this is the first matter of public importance (MPI) that I have proposed to the house since being elected. It is an honour to talk on this topic, but before I do I just want to, with indulgence, say that this is a matter of public importance that we are talking about today, but I understand there are many matters that are important to my community. I do want to reiterate my condolences to the families of the victims of the incident in Cobblebank and the other incidents around Wyndham recently and share that we will be working hard with them over these coming few days on some more action that we want to see. I just wanted to briefly reflect on that, but I do want to return to the statement that I have put to the house, which is that we affirm the importance of housing to Victorians and support the Allan Labor government's target of 800,000 homes over 10 years, the reforms underpinning it and the skilled workforce that will deliver it.

The communities I represent across Wyndham have welcomed people who have made the decision to build a home and a new life for decades. Our national economy relies on steady population growth, and it is not only economic benefits that come with people moving to our communities but also the enrichment of our social fabric. I have met thousands of residents in our new estates, all attracted to our communities because they have a chance to build something special. The Allan Labor government's target of 800,000 homes delivered over 10 years will mean more people get that chance.

Until very recently I was one of the only renters in this house. For people of my generation the prospect of owning your own home can feel very distant. Terrible landlords, rent increases and the uncertainty of not knowing when you will have to up and move means people do not set down roots in our communities. My fiancée and I have for years saved and scrimped and recently bought our first home, a modest little unit in Werribee not far from the beautiful Werribee River. Only now do we feel like we can put down deep roots in a town I have grown up in to build our adult lives in one place.

I have a lot of admiration for the Premier, so I was even more proud to hear her goal of being the leader that gets more millennials like me into a home of their own. For an entire generation this has felt more difficult than ever. Changes made by Liberal Prime Minister John Howard when we were just kids have turned the Australian dream of owning your own home into a neoliberal mess of housing being just another stock portfolio. While our suburbs grew, the federal Liberal–National government did nothing to support the infrastructure our growing outer suburbs needed – something I will return to later.

This is a generational problem, and for the fake fans of free-market principles opposite, I want to remind them that the solution is supply. However, as I mentioned in the MPI statement, this can only be achieved with reforms to the way we deliver this supply. In 2023 the Allan Labor government

released our housing statement, setting out a vision for the way we grow supply while building sustainable communities. Signature features of this policy were reforms to boost supply; design and standards to encourage building up, not out, which is something very important to my community; protecting renters rights; building more social housing; developing more homes in regional Victoria; and a range of other reforms to help first home buyers.

We have seen these reforms rolling out across Victoria, including the announcement this morning of the height limits around our train and tram activity zones. The issue we have is geographic. Melbourne has decades of greenfield development to meet this demand and has left us with a housing doughnut with its hole in middle suburbs like Brighton. Wyndham has the benefit of space for many of these dwellings, but we do need to look at this imbalance. After all, when you build in paddocks, you need to upgrade that infrastructure around it. These are things Labor has been good at in Wyndham. However, we know more needs to be done.

There is a bit of history around the situation we find ourselves in, which I want to reflect on. In the 1990s there were movements, like Save Our Suburbs in Camberwell, driven by concerns around neighbourhood character. This attitude is relatively new and seems to be confined to relatively privileged areas of Melbourne. Some of those opposite have subscribed to this attitude, so instead they look to the outer suburbs. When they had the brief privilege of government, they approved a flurry of greenfields development at 5 minutes to midnight in a dying term. All these precinct plans centred around my electorate. In Wyndham the then Minister for Planning, the member for Bulleen, approved the following precinct structure plans on greenfield sites: Westbrook, July 2014; Bolton Road, July 2014; Tarneit North, November 2014; Truganina, November 2014; and Riverdale, November 2014. How could the member for Bulleen have approved five precincts in the last six months of a term with no plan for infrastructure and no funding or plan for roads. The only road project they completed was an interchange at Sneydes Road, nowhere near the final flurry of precincts approved.

I mentioned earlier that while our suburbs grew, we saw no support from the federal Liberal–National government for a decade, despite their mates in Victoria approving tens of thousands of houses at the last minute. They spent not one cent on major roads in Wyndham. This stands in contrast with the partner we have in Canberra now. The Prime Minister has acknowledged the same problem the Premier has and is supporting us to grow supply sustainably. Thanks to the hard work of the federal member for Lalor, we have seen three major road projects around these precincts co-funded by Canberra. Greenfields development is important; in fact it is what has created the amazing communities I represent. However, to approve so much development without a plan for infrastructure was reckless, and now we see federal Liberal Senator Jacinta Price blaming pressures on infrastructure and services on the Indian Australian community. These disappointing sentiments miss the point. Our amazing Indian Australian community has helped develop businesses and provide services like health and education in our outer suburbs. The pressures on infrastructure and services are as a result of the neglect of a federal Liberal–National government to fund major projects in Melbourne’s west. The tens of thousands of houses approved at the last minute by the member for Bulleen, with no investment in infrastructure in Melbourne’s west, are the reason, not our Indian Australian community. I call on those opposite to call out their federal Liberal colleague and reflect on how their neglect of the west at a federal level has made lives harder for people in our outer suburbs. We have heard loud and clear that we need a break from the housing estates while this government continues to build the infrastructure we need to meet that increased demand in the outer suburbs. That is why I would welcome another one of these reforms that I referred to in my statement, the 10-year greenfields plan to help meet the housing and infrastructure demand in our outer suburbs. The plan sets out future precincts, and I reiterate: there will be no new precincts in the Werribee electorate due to start planning until 2029. This gives me and the government time to continue to build the infrastructure we need, like our game-changing Wyndham ring-road or upgrades to our bus network.

To turn in from the outer suburbs, I want to return to one of the other reforms by the Allan Labor government: the activity centre pilot. These look at unlocking potential space for development in

places with access to existing public transport, as the Premier mentioned earlier today in question time. The member for Brighton decried the proposed height limits this morning in these suburbs that have been released for consultation today. He described the changes as part of a desire by the government to turn the Bayside suburbs into the Gold Coast. While turning Bayside into the Gold Coast may help the member get a more tanned complexion, our activity centres are instead a sensible approach to building up our middle suburbs to take on some of the demand for housing we are seeing.

The member for Brighton also said in that same press conference that a future Liberal government will cut these activity centres – another cut and another cut where they have no plan for growing our housing supply. We have seen this sentiment shared as well by Ms Lovell in the other place:

There is no point putting a very low income, probably welfare-dependent family in the best street in Brighton where the children cannot mix with others or go to the school with other children, or where they do not have the same ability to have the latest in sneakers and iPhones.

Now, I do not know what the obsession with iPhones is in that one – maybe Ms Lovell is an Android fan – but I think it really reflects a dangerous sentiment towards what good sustainable housing in our middle suburbs actually means. And it sees a lot of that attitude of previous generations that are locking out people in my generation and future generations from being able to own their own home and live where they have grown up. These short-sighted comments are a kick in the guts to the hard work we do in the outer suburbs, and seeing protests in these leafy suburbs against reasonable development makes it feel like we are doing that heavy lifting.

This morning the Minister for Planning referred to the sheer percentage difference between the housing approvals in Wyndham versus housing approvals in places like Bayside. I have referenced this in the house before, but it is cute – the very few housing approvals that happen in these middle suburbs that have good access to public transport. The Premier mentioned earlier today that they were at Kew, which has probably two tram lines and access to multiple bus routes as well as being nearby to the Eastern Freeway. That is one of the issues with those opposite. It is that they are not seeing that there is so much opportunity to build up and to have sustainable growth in these middle suburbs to fix this housing doughnut.

To turn some of the member for Brighton's comments from his press conference this morning around on him, I do not know if they just do not like the western suburbs. They were happy to support precincts at the eleventh hour of a dying government in 2014 and neglect to fund any infrastructure in the west. But when it comes to fixing the middle ring and growing Melbourne sustainably, they retreat to the old arguments of the 1990s. Labor's work on activity centres – planning for more growth and homes around transport, jobs and services, with these pilot centre locations gazetted through VC257 and GC252 early this year – was a result of that community engagement process that happens. I note that the announcement this morning is part of that community engagement to show those designs – and it is not the 20 storeys that the member for Brighton was talking about; I think it ends up being about 14 to 16, depending on which end of Brighton you look at – are sustainable, reasonable development in our middle ring.

Our Townhouse and Low-rise Code sets up those consistent standards across the state for townhouses and multi-residential developments of three storeys or less, giving that certainty to industry. All these reforms on their own do not solve housing affordability. They complement our work when it comes to the greenfields development that I spoke about earlier. There is more to do, and there is more we are willing to do. I think it is important, too, that when we consider the needs of housing, we also consider who is going to be building that housing. We have got that pipeline of skilled workers that are coming through our TAFE system, our VET system and our VET in schools. At my previous place of employment, Wyndham Central College, we were happy to host our VET building and construction, where many of those future tradies who will be working on these projects in our middle ring, as well as in our outer suburbs, are getting their cert III and are able to continue on into the industry and look to get their apprenticeships.

We have also invested \$16 billion in new and base funding into skills and TAFE systems since we have come into power. This week we have launched our new campaign around encouraging young people to consider TAFE and consider our free TAFE courses. And I think it is particularly important as a lot of year 12s head into exam season – and some of them might be doing the great vocational major, another Labor government initiative – that they consider going into TAFE, because we need to have those people who can help build this new generation of housing for the next generation.

We need to work on greenfields development and we need to work on fixing the inner ring of Melbourne, but we cannot put this off. To delay and cut initiatives to grow housing supply sustainably will put not only my generation, the millennials, but generations to come at risk of not owning a home. I am so lucky to have been able to scrimp and save to buy a house in the area I have grown up in. The Liberals' short-sightedness in indicating that they will cut this activity centre program means thousands of their own constituents in my generation and the next – do not forget the zoomers – may never be able to do the same. Our reforms through our greenfields plan and our activity centres are a balanced approach to building supply.

In concluding my remarks today and setting us off on this matter of public importance, I want to reiterate what I said to this house not too long ago. Our planning policy has these two sides to it when it comes to Melbourne's growth and supporting these 800,000 new houses over 10 years. And I reiterate this point once again to those opposite and people thinking of blocking the activity centre zones and getting in the way of these reasonable planning scheme amendments that we are putting forward: give Werribee the break we need, and build it in Brighton.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:16): It is a shame to think that in the midst of one of the worst housing crises this state has experienced since the postwar period, when the lack of affordability is at record levels, the waiting lists for homes are at record levels, the decline in rental availability is at record levels, on every metric you can imagine in housing in the state of Victoria today we are in a worse situation than we were 10 years ago. And to see the member for Werribee get up and, in an area that has a real housing crisis, in an area where land release, precinct planning, is so far behind schedule, where public transport connections have been absolutely ignored – the amount of times his leader and previous leaders have stood in the western suburbs promising new train lines that have never occurred.

Not only that, I will remind the member for Werribee, as I regularly drive through that wonderful part of Melbourne on my way back to the wonderful seat of Polwarth, that his constituents spend half an hour, 45 minutes, an hour every night stuck on the same freeway off-ramps that existed when I was a kid some 45 years ago. They have not altered or improved the connections for the people who have to go back into an area now whose population is, what, three, four, five times what it was 45 years ago. There has not been one improvement for the people of the west – the laziness. Not only did the former Treasurer – who did not, by the way, live there, so he probably did not realise there were queues on the off-ramps. I do accept that the current member for Werribee has some connection to that electorate, but he himself has not once spoken here about the queues every night, night in, night out, that his constituents have to endure. And then he wonders and talks –

John Lister: On a point of order, Speaker, just on the accuracy of that statement, I have spoken in the house about that queue at the C109 exit at Main Road interchange.

The SPEAKER: Member for Werribee, that is not a point of order.

Richard RIORDAN: I admire the honesty of the member for Werribee in admitting what a lousy job not only he has done but his predecessors have done in providing the suitable livable assets that that community needs from the state. It is a fact that his party have been in charge for 10 years, and what have they delivered to the west in 10 years? Nothing. And to have the gall to stand up here today and spend 40 to 50 per cent of his talk on the housing crisis obsessing with his love affair with the member for Brighton – the member for Brighton does a fantastic job representing –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Member for Polwarth, I would ask you to cease banging the table.

Richard RIORDAN: I acknowledge that. I will keep my hands firmly clasped upon the table. But the member for Werribee has done a great disservice to his community obsessing with the member for Brighton and his strong advocacy for what his community expects him to represent. He could in fact take a leaf out of the member for Brighton's book on how to represent his community.

Let us talk about this government's achievement in housing, because after all, the matter of public importance (MPI) was not about the member for Werribee's personal obsession with the member for Brighton. He perhaps may wish to seek advice from the member for Brighton on how to do his hair, for example, because clearly he has got something to learn in that space. However, let us look at –

John Lister: On a point of order, Speaker, I think that was a personal imputation, and I do not think that is allowed under the standing orders. I would ask the member to reflect on his own hirsute situation.

The SPEAKER: Personal imputations are not allowed in the house. Member for Polwarth, come back to the MPI.

Richard RIORDAN: I thought that I was in fact giving worldly advice.

The SPEAKER: Back to the MPI, member for Polwarth.

Richard RIORDAN: I apologise. Back to the MPI, let us look at some of the key measuring points that any rational person who was not the year 9 work experience student who did the preparation for notes for the member for Werribee would have looked at. Let us look at some of the facts. First of all, this government has proclaimed to have the Big Housing Build. The Big Housing Build, by its very name, would imply that we are building lots of houses, but that is in fact not the case. It is a sad fact that 64,117 families will not have a home to go to tonight. That is a massive increase on the situation only a short time ago. The social housing stock in Victoria and the applicants that are applying for it – it is a 13 per cent increase in just one year. In just one year, despite the billions this government claims to spend on housing, that waiting list has increased 13 per cent – and not only that, it is a massive increase over the time of this government. Some 9900 unfortunate families were trapped on that list when they came to government, and there are now 64,117. What is worse, we know the figure tonight is possibly even worse because this government has refused to release the most recent figures, and we are now nearly three months behind the public release of what those figures should be today.

Why have we got a ballooning list? Despite what the member for Werribee said in his opening remarks when he talked about the fact that a Liberal federal government had not spent money on infrastructure for the greenfields and the growth suburbs of Melbourne, let me remind the member for Werribee and others who might want to push that old cart down the road that on a greenfield site in Victoria today some 45 per cent of the cost of a home is taxes and charges not collected by the federal government but collected by this government. The increases in taxes and charges and land taxes and windfall gain taxes and growth area funds and developer charges are all going to the coffers here in Spring Street. And guess where the single biggest spend is? The single biggest spend is not in the west with the member for Werribee. In fact this government are investing even more into the eastern suburbs of Melbourne in what they are calling the biggest housing project, which most other people think is an underground train line. It is an underground train line that is not benefiting the growth suburbs. The money is being taken from the growth suburbs – it is being taken from the west, it is being taken from the north, it is being taken from the far south-east – and it is all going into vanity projects of this government. More than enough money is being collected by this government, and is in the coffers of this budget, to pay for the real and necessary infrastructure to make Melbourne livable for everybody and to provide homes for everybody.

Let us talk about those homes. How much more space have we got today after a five-year Big Housing Build? Can you believe it, we have 454 less bedrooms than when we started. It is a magic kind of incompetence that could spend so much money and get such bad outcomes. Those 64,117 families who do not have a home to go to tonight – that massive 14.22 per cent increase on what it was last year – are being exacerbated because the increases in taxes and charges here in the state of Victoria have seen property owners exit Victoria.

In terms of the private housing stock, the total active bonds collected has decreased in the last couple of years by 24,726. Can you imagine that? In a state where we have a housing crisis, the industry that we need to help support government and help support the community housing sector, the private housing rental market, is in freefall. It is in freefall in a state where this government wants you to blame neighbourhoods in the eastern suburbs. They want us to blame councils. They want to blame greedy developers. In fact the member for Werribee spent half his speech blaming the Howard government. You have got to go back to pre-2007 to come up with the excuse that it is the Howard government's fault we have a housing crisis. No, we have a housing crisis because this government is addicted – absolutely addicted – to collecting taxes, charges, fees and levies and imposing unnecessary regulation on the housing market. We have a supply issue. That is the one thing I will agree with the member for Werribee on. He acknowledges it is a supply problem. It is a self-inflicted supply problem.

I want to put to rest another furphy that this government is very big on. They say, 'Oh, well, we're Victoria. We're building the most houses of any state.' Well, guess what, Labor government here in Victoria: we have the most people coming in – some 150,000-odd. Our capacity to build does not even get close to half the amount of people coming in. With the migration to Victoria from interstate and around Australia and from natural growth we are falling miles behind in meeting those expectations. It is a shameful effort. It is not true for this government to say they are building the most houses. Per capita we are dismally behind the rest of the nation. New South Wales, Queensland and other states are better equipped, better resourced and better skilled at matching their home production with their immigration and migration rates. This state is falling way behind. We are not the number one home builder. We are in fact barely making fourth place in terms of keeping up. For heaven's sake, when South Australia can beat us, then we know we are doing something wrong here in Victoria. It is an indictment on this government's ability to manage housing. The sooner this government realise that it is not about how many hard hats the Premier gets a photo with, until they understand that it is not about the amount of fluoro vests, until they understand that it is not about the announcement, it is about the output and the outcome – two things this government fundamentally do not understand.

On the activity zones, the member in his opening remarks referred to the government's announcements today on more activity zones. Once again this government is using the politics of neighbourhood envy, the politics of blame, to come up with the reason why it wants to do what it does. Let us think about what the activity zones are. The activity zone policy that this government currently has says, 'We're going to put the size of the city of Adelaide into existing suburbs.' Has there been one word mentioned from this government about how they are going to increase public transport into those suburbs? Because this might come as a surprise: most of the people living in those suburbs now probably do not think there are enough regular train services and find themselves squashed on there. Well, hello, folks – we are about to give you another 800,000 people on the same services.

Are our schools in these existing suburbs completely empty and void and able to deal with a city the size of Adelaide being put into them? Into existing health services? I am not sure there are any advocates out there for child care saying, 'Oh, yes, Victorian government, you're exactly right. We can absolutely take another 800,000 people and fit them into our existing childcare and health services.' This government has a magic pudding approach to planning and activity here in the state of Victoria. The magic pudding is: we can just keep putting people in there because there is a train station. Therefore, train station equals the necessary amenity, the necessary services, the necessary community capacity to take those people – no. The fact quite simply is: this government has done a terrible job at planning for the future of Victoria. They have restricted supply through unnecessary taxation,

regulation and bureaucracy that is choking the development industry. Their policy that we can provide good-quality, affordable housing for working families here in Victoria in existing suburbs in high-rise towers is simply a nonsense. No-one in the industry believes it. No-one in the community believes it.

Quite frankly, the member for Werribee says, ‘We as a government are going to stop allowing people to buy a house for less than \$800,000 in our suburbs, and instead we’re going to offer them a \$1.5 million two-bedroom unit in the middle of an existing suburb as an alternative.’ If the member does not realise that is not the choice that most Victorians will make – sure, it is an option and a choice for some people. But to afford a \$1.5 million apartment you have to have a certain income, and the reality is, at those levels and at those prices, more than 80 per cent of average Victorians cannot afford to ever get into the housing market, least of all afford to rent properties at those types of prices.

This government needs an affordability policy, not a planning override policy that does not deliver on what Victorians need. In fact this government has neglected its responsibility to bring everyone along on the housing journey. They have abandoned young millennials. They have abandoned young Victorians. They have given up on the dream of owning a home. They want their large union mates and their large CFMEU building contractors to control where and how people live. It is not fair. It is a disingenuous and, as the member for Brighton would say, a very, very sneaky approach to dealing with housing.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Werribee, this is your last warning.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (16:31): I thank the member for Polwarth for his contribution, of which there were some bits I would probably agree with. For instance, I have not had a haircut for a while, and a big shout-out to Shannon from Halston in my patch, in Stephensons Road. She moved her shift and was not available on Mondays anymore, and as a result this is why I look like this. But she does a fantastic job with not a lot to work with, and I appreciate that.

Let us get on to the matter of public importance, and I thank our member for Werribee for raising this today, because if we can try and carve through some of the ‘He said, she said, what for, whereabouts’, housing affordability is a problem that we all agree with. If you cut through the politics, everyone in this chamber understands it, I would say. I agree with the member for Werribee that this problem did not start in 1999 with certain changes brought by a former federal government, but they certainly did make a change. I am not blaming everything on previous governments of any stripe, but we did make a decision as a country to vote for a system where investing in property became speculative. Further to that, over the last 26 years or thereabouts we have now got to a position in our country with a mix of not only those changes – and it is not just negative gearing. Negative gearing all by itself – I think there are some arguments for it; I am not completely against it. But the capital gains tax discount that came in at the same time supercharged that, and as a result, people like me and Bec, who were very lucky to buy our first place in 1999, got tripled wealth in 10 years. That is not sustainable as a country, and the next generation – member for Werribee, you are a young man – will not get that tripling of their wealth. At the same time, as a country we also had federal policy to keep wage inflation low. We would all understand from an economic point of view why you do not want rampant inflation – no objection to that. But together with those two things, they have been a large part of our housing affordability problem.

As others have said, supply – I do not believe it is the only solution. I do think if our federal Treasurer decided to cut the capital gains tax discount by about 2 per cent, you would see a whole lot of things change in a hurry. But we cannot do that as a state government. No matter who is sitting in these chairs, we cannot do that; we do not have that option.

We have two options. Most of the revenue that we tax ourselves is property based, so we could lower our state revenue. I do not see that happening any time soon with not only this government in Victoria but any state government around the place. The other side is supply, and that we can affect and that

we can encourage. Now, I might question the member for Polwarth's maths; somehow we are building in raw numbers more, but all right, when we look at populations, we are worse than, was it South Australia? You know – nice argument. I also question the 45 per cent cost one. I actually have had chats with members who might be on the other side who might have said, 'Oh, yes, we sort of know that's not right.' But anyway, I would not name anyone – that would be rude. Look, rhetoric is what rhetoric does – make your arguments, but we need to focus on supply because that is the lever that we can affect as a government. Obviously, the draft plans for activity centres have been announced today for further consultation, and that is a part of the supply response. The Suburban Rail Loop, which is pretty popular in my patch, is another part of the supply response. Before I go on further, the social housing and public housing investment is also part of the supply response.

If we look at other changes that were made this year in regard to planning for townhouses, for granny flats, for all of these things which are not universally popular – I appreciate that not everyone likes the idea that things may change over time, and I will come back to that in a moment – they are all part of the response that a government can have to help put incentives on supply.

I had a chat with – and I hope Ms Oldham will not mind me mentioning this; I do not think she will, actually – Jane Oldham from the Boroondara Community Group last week. We sat down with another constituent of mine, Nick. She told me about her concerns about the government's plans in this area. It is fair to say I think – I do not think I am verballing Jane – that she is not overly happy with the changes that are being proposed or put forward, and that is fine. I encourage her and every member of her group to put their voices into the consultation process. She did state at one point that while she was not happy with the process probably at all in regard to the pilot Camberwell centre, she did accept that the process for the first tranche of what has come out today in the drafts has been more extensive, and that is great. I hope that she puts her voice in; we want as many voices as we can to get into this process. We have got a neighbourhood activity centre process starting up in tranche 2, probably a month away. I do not have a date yet, but I will update my constituents as soon as it is possible. The more voices we get, the better.

It is important to consider some of the retorts, for want of a better word, that come back from people who are concerned about this. Some of them are – and I think the member for Polwarth may have even gone close to this – 'What about the schools?' We hear, 'What about the drainage?' Activity centres are planning for height limits over the next 20, 30 years. This is based on, in my understanding, working towards a city of Melbourne that is likely to be 9 million people by 2050. Now, if it does not become a city of 9 million people by 2050, the economics and the market economy of these things is they will not get built. There will be no money in them, so no-one is going to build them. But if we keep growing as we are, it is incumbent on government to be responsible and to plan for what that looks like. Because, as I said to the eastern group of councils last year when they were raising concerns about the housing targets, 'Well, okay. Statisticians are telling us that the population in this area is going to grow by X, Y, Z over the next 30 years. Have you done any planning on how many blocks are going to get cut into two or on what that will do to your parking, your drainage, your schools and everything else?' 'Oh, no, we haven't done that.' Of course they have not done that, because they are a local council, and they are not necessarily looking that far ahead.

We have got a government in Victoria right now that is trying to look that far ahead and say: how are we going to do this? How are we going to do this with some balance? How are we going to do this so we focus, if we are going to grow this way, on how we grow this way sustainably in a city that we all want to live in? And it is actually trying to put it forward.

I commend the Premier, because this is actually difficult for people. We all move into our suburbs because we love our suburbs, and then we think, 'Hang on, things might change in a year or five years, 10 years or 20 years.' Some people will definitely take that as meaning that it is now. It is not now, it is over time, but I get it. This is why consultation is important and everyone should have their say. We should be able to have these conversations seriously, because if we do not plan for the growth, it will just happen regardless and there will be more issues like we have seen, with all due respects to my

colleagues in the west, with some of the mistakes of the past where you have got these big blocks of houses with only one road in and out. We can blame whoever you like – councils, planning, whatever – but it is important that we not only understand the problem but do something towards the solution so that the next generation hopefully can afford a house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:41): I am pleased to rise to speak on this matter of public importance (MPI). Indeed I thought all my Christmases had come at once when I saw the matter of public importance come across yesterday. I thought, 'Surely the government is not going to get up and try and brag about what wonderful things it is doing on housing.' As the member for Polwarth has indicated, there are many, many, many failings of the government on housing. And as we heard in question time on the issue of crime, there are a lot of things that government is going to do or the government says it has done, but there are not many actual outcomes that are improving things for Victorians, particularly when it comes to housing, including in regional Victoria, where housing is just as big an issue as it is here in metropolitan areas.

I want to start with a little bit on local things and on social housing, because we hear a lot from this government about social housing and what it is doing. The member for Polwarth referenced the Big Housing Build. Five billion dollars, we were told, would build 12,000 homes. The stats from the electorate of Gippsland South cover the three local government areas in Gippsland South, which include Latrobe city, which my colleague the member for Morwell will be aware of. There are currently across those three local government areas – South Gippsland, Wellington and Latrobe city – 19 fewer homes now than there were in 2018. So for all the money being spent by this government on social housing, we have actually got less. And that is not even going to the issue of how many bedrooms there are, as the member for Polwarth highlighted. That is a serious issue.

The member for Polwarth and I were both on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) for a number of years, and we heard a lot from the former Minister for Housing about the Big Housing Build – '12,000, 12,000, 12,000, 12,000', we heard; 15,000 at one stage. But it took two or three years before I think actually the former Speaker eventually acknowledged: 'Well, no, that's not actually going to be all the new houses; that's just the ones we're going to build.' And we have seen that in the statistics. Somewhere like Latrobe city, which actually needs additional public housing, is going backwards, and I am sure places like Mildura and Shepparton will tell you a similar story. On the private housing side of things, again in Gippsland South, there were 312 less rentals between June 2018 and June 2024, and less than half of those were considered affordable. That is the result that we are getting from this government because of the many things that it is doing or failing to do.

I pick up the specifics of the MPI – that this house supports the Labor government's target of 800,000 homes over 10 years. Well, we probably all support the target. It is easy to set a target; actually delivering it is the important thing. But what I want to pick up on is the next line, which says 'the reforms underpinning it'. I would perhaps ask the member for Werribee or any future speakers which reforms they are referring to. Are they referring to the increases in land tax? Are they referring to the reduction in the threshold for land tax, from \$300,000 to \$50,000 – a temporary reduction, I might add, a temporary COVID debt reduction, that lasts for 10 years. I mean, your child born today will be in grade 5 before this temporary reduction is dealt with. Is it the vacant residential land tax – is that one of the reforms underpinning their growth in housing? Is it the short-stay tax? Is it the windfall gains tax? Is it one of any of 63 new or increased taxes introduced by this government, half of which are on our property?

Jade Benham interjected.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that if they are not in their place they cannot interject.

Danny O'BRIEN: That does seem to be the view of this government, member for Mildura, that landlords are evil. But we cannot call them landlords; they are 'rental providers'. But the problem is,

as I have just provided to the house, they are not providing many rentals anymore, and there is a very good reason for that – because they are feeling the pinch.

I have used this example from my electorate a couple of times before, but I got an email several years ago from some constituents, a couple who are retired teachers. They are not land barons. You would not call them landlords at all – retired teachers. They have got three or four units in Sale. Their land tax last year had gone to \$2775. Two years earlier it had been \$385. That is the increase in land tax they had found, which is just a massive, massive increase. These are people that deliberately go out of their way to try and get tenants who are single mums or pensioners. My constituents – as I said, they are retired teachers. We desperately try and keep the cost down. They wrote to me initially about the increase in costs of being a rental provider from having to meet all the new requirements that the government brought in 2021. That year, when they had to get all their rental properties up to scratch, literally that cost half their rental income that year. So it was virtually wiped off, because of course once they factored in rates, electricity, other services and interest rates, they were not going to make any money out of that. And that is repeated across the state time and time again.

As we are travelling around, we talk to investors, we talk to real estate agents. They are just aghast at the policies that this government is taking, and they are voting with their feet and moving away. I think I am right in saying the member for Gippsland East has told the story – he might have even said it in here. He went to Queensland last year and was talking with a –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: He probably did go fishing, member for Polwarth. He was talking to a real estate agent who said, 'Whatever you're doing down there in Victoria, don't change anything, because all the Victorians are coming to Queensland and bringing their money up here and buying investment properties.' That is not a surprise. Why would you invest in Victoria when you are just going to get tax after tax after tax?

Of course there is another big one coming with the emergency services tax, and I say 'coming' because we have already got the hit now on residential properties and on commercial properties. We have had a doubling of the rate for the emergency services tax. But next year a new tax is coming in on non-principal primary residents, and that is in the budget papers. There was a jump up in the projections of what the increase would be, from around \$620 million to \$800 million. We asked in the other place during the debate on this what that jump up is: 'Is that just valuation increases, Treasurer?' And the Treasurer said, 'No, that's the introduction of the non-principal primary residence tax.' So there is a new increase coming that is going to massively impact on landlords and rental providers – \$500 million over the next three years.

Jade Benham: How much?

Danny O'BRIEN: Five hundred million dollars. This government – these economically inept people on that side – do not understand how this has an impact on renters, because that will be passed through. For all the things that I have just said, all the things that rental providers have had to deal with over the last couple of years, this is an additional one. They do not have the capacity to absorb that anymore. They cannot just absorb that.

When we asked the then Treasurer, the former member for Werribee, about this in PAEC two years ago, I said, 'How does this increase in the COVID debt levy land tax flow through to rents that renters are going to have to pay?' 'No, not an issue, Mr O'Brien. That is not an issue at all. We believe there are other factors that influence supply, not the taxes.' So for people like my constituents who saw their land tax in three years go from \$385 to \$2800, apparently that has no impact on their decision to continue to invest in rentals.

So this is not about impacting landlords – and absolutely it is, because they are walking away – but it gets passed on. Yet we hear from those opposite and we hear from the economic illiterates up the back

there in the Greens that we have got to do something to reduce the cost of rent. It is just not happening. Indeed the National Shelter and SGS Economics & Planning rental affordability index released in November showed that in regional Victoria rental affordability fell to record lows last year after 10 years of this survey going out. It is just not affordable. The average rental household in regional Victoria are now paying 28 per cent of their gross income, which is rated as moderately unaffordable. Well, I am not surprised when landlords are taxed like this, when developers are taxed like this so that there is no incentive and in fact there is a disincentive to actually build new homes or put more rental properties on the market. That is why you have a failure. That is why you have unaffordable housing, and most of it can be sheeted back to these economic illiterates on this side.

The SPEAKER: I remind members that if they are not in their allocated seats it is inappropriate to speak.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:51): I am very happy to stand here today and speak on the matter of public importance (MPI) that the member for Werribee has put forward:

That this house affirms the importance of housing to Victorians and supports the Allan Labor government's target of 800,000 homes over 10 years, the reforms underpinning it and the skilled workforce that will deliver it.

Housing is an incredibly important topic, and it is an everything issue. Almost all aspects of public policy intersect in some way with the topic of housing; whether it be inequality, fertility, health, climate change or economic growth, you name it, housing intersects with it. Housing affordability is one of the greatest economic and social challenges facing our state today. For too many Victorians the dream of owning a home or even living in the community they grew up in is drifting further out of reach. At the core of this crisis is a simple truth: we do not have enough homes in the places where people want and need to live. Unless we change how we plan and build our suburbs, we risk creating a Victoria where opportunity is limited by postcode and where wealth determines who gets to live where. That is not the future we want, and that is why this government is taking bold steps to build more homes and deliver real housing choices for all Victorians.

We know that the biggest issue with housing is lack of supply. We simply do not have enough homes in the areas where people want to live to keep costs at a manageable level for workers. Without radical changes to how we build our suburbs, we are at risk of gating off entire areas or even entire councils to future generations, to low- and middle-income people and to minority communities that are socio-economically disadvantaged. Why is it right that areas such as Brighton or Kew or Toorak be impossible for so many to live in? These areas have the resources that people want to live near – great public transport and access to public services and education and other amenities. They are already there. Of course these areas are in massive demand because of these things; that is part of the reason why purchasing a home there is so expensive. But right now, unless you are incredibly fortunate to have a high income that you have worked hard for or inherit wealth, then you just cannot afford to live in these communities. That is why building more medium-density in these areas and other middle-ring suburbs is so important.

Of course some are always going to be able to purchase bigger or nicer homes further out where amenities may be more limited, and that is the trade-off. But it means there is a choice that is available where Victorians can decide what they want to prioritise and what works best for them and their family. Right now that choice does not exist.

It is not just about the wealthiest areas, though, and that is why I am so pleased to have both Noble Park and Springvale in my electorate included in the new train and tram activity centres. And not only am I excited; so is my community and so is the business association in my area. They are excited to see this, because without greater choice within our suburbs, the reality is many people who grow up in my community do not have the ability to purchase a home here anymore. Many move away from their families, and others end up renting long term. I want to stress that these are not necessarily bad options; it is all about choice and trade-offs and what a person or family's preferences are. But right

now many people simply do not have that choice. They do not have the option in any capacity to live where they grew up, be close to family and be close to friends, and I believe that should be an option that is available to everyone, regardless of where they grow up.

The opposition clearly have different views on this. They do not want to see homes built in this state, and they want housing to be more and more unaffordable for everyday hardworking Victorians. While the Shadow Treasurer is out protesting the construction of homes in his community, this government is actually out building homes and getting stuff done. The member for Hawthorn, the previous Leader of the Opposition, even climbed onto the back of a ute to protest a social housing project in Hawthorn which provides 200 homes to people in need, such as those suffering from domestic and family violence. The path those opposite want us to head down is one where it would be effectively statistically impossible for somebody who grows up in my electorate to live in large portions of our state by establishing de facto gated communities. Honestly, I think that is a depressing reality that we need to avoid.

I would also like to quote a current Liberal member, Mr Mulholland, who sits in the other place. He said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

If the Liberal Party wants to remain relevant to young people, they must reject the short-sighted and unfair approach of pulling up the ladder and instead drop it down so the next generation can secure a home.

I hope that those opposite, such as the member for Hawthorn and the member for Brighton, follow their colleague's advice, because why would a young person support the Liberal Party when it is doing everything it actively can to try and sabotage young people's futures and ability to purchase a home on their own? Honestly, those opposite should be more explicit in their language. They should just say outright that they hate young people living in their leafy communities and that they do not want people who need access to social housing, such as victims of domestic and family violence, living in their suburbs.

Last time the Liberals were in government every single budget delivered significant cuts to housing assistance, social housing and support for disadvantaged Victorians to access the rental market. I will go through my list. \$348.8 million was cut from social housing funding in the Liberals' 2011–12 budget, \$1.8 million was cut from housing assistance and support programs in the Liberals' 2012–13 budget, \$13.1 million was cut from housing assistance and support programs in the Liberals' 2013–2014 budget and 210 dwellings were cut from the social housing acquisition program in the Liberals' 2014–15 budget. This to me smells of elitism – forget about social housing, forget about those that really need housing. But we on this side are doing it. We are building homes. We are there to support people who need housing.

The issue of housing affordability has broader impacts on wealth inequality within our society. Constraints on housing supply are turning housing into a scarce asset, more similar to bonds, fine art, fine wine and stocks. This has not always been the case and is not even the case in major cities around the world. In Tokyo, for example, the planning laws in place allow for rising demand to lead directly to more supply, not higher prices. The issue of a lack of housing supply has meant that most economic growth has accrued to landowners and less to everyone else. Economist Thomas Piketty has demonstrated an increase in the share of national income that flows to owners of capital, rather than to workers within developed countries with a lack of housing supply.

In many Western countries this has manifested as an increase in the share of income going to landowners or rents, driven by the massive increases in housing costs. We effectively have a scenario where those traditionally on the lowest incomes with more insecure work, renters, are seeing the largest burden from a lack of housing supply. This is why the Allan Labor government's rental reforms are so critical for many Victorians. We need to give renters some of the same stability and choice that

home ownership provides and provide support to get them into the housing market as first home buyers.

I know I touched briefly on housing and fertility, and I would like to make one final point that is more rarely spoken about in the context of housing, and that is people's ability to start a family. You can frame this as an issue of birthrates falling and managing that, but I prefer to talk about it in the context of choice. The more expensive an extra bedroom is, the more expensive it is to have one or more children. Expensive housing forces people to wait before having kids and takes away options for where they can move to when they do purchase or rent a home. I believe that if a family wants to have a child – or two or three or however many they want – then we should be creating an economy where that choice is available for everyone, and the government's housing agenda supports this vision. We should be constructing more three-bedroom apartments, which are massively in demand but rarely built, to allow more families to affordably live in areas with high-quality amenities. I would like to finish by reaffirming that I support this MPI, and credit to the member for Werribee for putting it forward.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (17:01): I rise to address this matter of public importance (MPI) where the government asks us to affirm the importance of housing and endorse its target of 800,000 homes over 10 years. Lofty targets and glossy announcements mean little after a decade of failed delivery. Labor have promised 80,000 homes per year, yet their record shows they cannot even meet a fraction of that.

Let us ask a few important questions after nearly 23 out of 27 years with a Labor government and nearly 12 years of a Labor government in a row. Is the public housing waitlist at record lows? No, it is at record highs, with over 66,000 on the public housing waitlist and over 30,000 people on the priority list. That is an increase of over 13 per cent in the last 12 months. That compares to 9900 or so when the Liberals were last in government in 2014. Is homelessness now at record lows? No, we are at record highs, including the peninsula, which has the highest rate of rough sleeping now in Victoria. Is it really easy for Victorians to buy affordable houses and get affordable rentals? No, we have a housing crisis. It is getting harder and harder, more expensive and more out of reach. Are land and other property taxes at record lows, encouraging investment in housing? No yet again; they are at record highs, discouraging investment and seeing people flee the rental provider market, meaning less stock and higher rents. For example, new lettings decreased for Victoria between March 2023 and 2024 by more than 11.8 per cent.

Lastly, are new homes being built left, right and centre? No yet again. For 10 years, housing outcomes have gone from bad to disastrous. Labor vowed to deliver 80,000 homes per year in 2023, yet in reality barely 55,000 homes were built in that same period. I will give you another example. Currently there is a 60 per cent shortfall of homes approved compared to the increase in population, so for every 100,000 people coming to Victoria, there are only 40,000 new homes approved. In fact the number of new homes being started in the year to March 2024 sank to just over 51,000, a decade low. During this period we also saw the fewest monthly approvals for detached houses in Victoria since 2013. This directly links into stability. Having housing means simple things like having a shower, looking after one's family, getting into or staying in education and work and much more. I know this, having worked with Donation Chain a number of years ago to bring about a community shower facility in Frankston.

It is getting harder than ever to buy or rent a home in Victoria. Melbourne's rental vacancy rate sits at 1.8 per cent, hitting a historic low last year at 1.3 per cent. Total active bonds for Victoria between September 2023 and September 2024 decreased by over 24,700. This suggests a wipe-out of thousands of rental properties. There was the announcement of the Big Housing Build in 2020. Social housing stock in June 2020 was just over 85,000, and in June 2024 it was 89,500 – a net increase of just 4300 or so in four years. The government claim that they have delivered an additional 11,575 homes to 2025, but they demolished and discarded 5716 homes in the same period, so they only added 5859 homes. Unoccupied housing in June 2020 was 3855. In June 2024 it was 5087 – an increase of just 1232 vacant homes.

Overall since June 2020 there are 423 less public housing bedrooms as well, and it is no wonder that the social housing waitlist has blown out to over 66,000 as of today – as I mentioned, an over 13 per cent increase in just one year. That is 66,000 vulnerable Victorians waiting, often for many years, for a secure home. Many of these individuals are domestic violence victims. Victorians who have experienced family violence are on average waiting two years for public housing. More specifically, women and children are waiting, according to the budget papers most recently, almost 18 months for priority housing. Indeed the number of people seeking housing due to domestic violence is growing at an alarming rate, increasing by over 14 per cent in the last year. I do want to note that the member for Narracan actually did a fair bit in this space in his electorate before he was a member, and if you compare that with, say, the Mornington Peninsula, the member for Narracan has actually done more in the domestic violence housing space in his area than the government has done on the Mornington Peninsula. Fortunately, there is a similar community initiative that is coming, which is Moonah House, and I went to a Celtic fundraiser for them on Saturday night to raise funding towards this initiative which will provide important housing for women and children who are fleeing family violence. But that is a community initiative with little to no government support. As well, a lady contacted me in the last week, who I have now helped to get onto the priority public housing waitlist. She faces eviction on 24 September – this month – with no options yet, after having escaped domestic violence and therefore no longer being able to afford rent on her own.

If we look more generally across this whole issue, Labor has the lowest proportion of social housing in Australia – just 2.9 per cent of dwellings. That has led to a homelessness crisis. In 2023–24 over 102,000 Victorians sought assistance from homelessness services. As I mentioned, the peninsula has the highest rate of rough sleeping now in the state. What is holding this back? One factor is red tape. The body representing caravan and residential parks has indicated that with simple red-tape changes they could have an extra 200,000 homes within their facilities in just a few years. Another is taxes. Since coming to power once again in 2014, this Labor government have introduced or increased 63 taxes, around half of which have hit property and housing. The result is that Victoria's property industry has been treated like an ATM, expected to cough up billions and billions of dollars a year in land tax, stamp duty and other charges – around half of all state revenue. We have also had, for example, the vacant residential land tax and the emergency services tax, which has already been introduced in parts on, for example, residential and commercial properties, but it is going to be going up even further next year and particularly hitting farmers as well. We have also had the scrapping of the off-the-plan stamp duty concessions, increased land tax, the new short-stay tax and more. Each of these policies make it more expensive or more difficult to build, sell or otherwise own a home or property in Victoria, and many of these costs are passed through to renters and push rental providers out of the market altogether, meaning less stock.

For example, when Labor scrapped the off-the-plan stamp duty concessions in 2017, apartment sales plummeted by 33 per cent the next year, leading to fewer new apartments being built and reducing state revenue by an estimated \$924 million. Indeed the Urban Development Institute of Australia warns that unless there is urgent tax reform, Victoria will build only half as many apartments between 2022 and 2027 as it did in the previous five years, and that is indeed a disastrous outcome.

I want to, in the last minute, focus on the Mornington Peninsula. Homelessness has surged by 37 per cent in the past five years, according to Southern Peninsula Community Support. There are over 3000 applications for public housing from Mornington Peninsula residents out of the 66,000 altogether. Half of these are classed as priority, such as the person I mentioned fleeing family violence who approached me in the last week. The shire's latest research identifies that at least 689 people are out there experiencing homelessness on any given night, although the true number is likely much higher. We now have people sleeping rough in cars, on the foreshore and elsewhere. Many are women – around 60 per cent of those seeking crisis help – and often older women over 50 who have nowhere to go. Shockingly, around 20 per cent of homelessness on the peninsula is being faced by those who are under 18 years old. So we need to do a lot more in this space, and this MPI makes a mockery of what this Labor government claims to be doing. They need to do a lot more.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:11): I am delighted to be speaking on the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Werribee:

That this house affirms the importance of housing to Victorians and supports the Allan Labor government's target of 800,000 homes over 10 years, the reforms underpinning it and the skilled workforce that will deliver it.

It is always great to stand up in this place and speak about the importance of housing for all Victorians. I am so proud to be a member of the state Labor government, a government that is committed to investing in housing and building more homes for Victorians close to public transport, employment opportunities, schools and educational institutions. Homes are more than just a place to live. Homes are so much more than a roof over your head. Homes are a place to feel safe and to spend time with your family and friends and a place to feel connected to a community. When we talk about our target of building 800,000 homes, we are not just talking about some bricks and plaster, a roof with solar panels and a splash of paint. We are talking about a vision for our state to ensure that every Victorian can access a home in the place they want to live in. Whether they are renting, buying or living in social housing, every Victorian should be able to live in the community that they want to live in.

Like many communities around Victoria, there are many families and households in Geelong's northern suburbs that rely on social housing for a secure home. The northern suburbs of Geelong, particularly in postcode 3214, which covers Corio and Norlane, have some of the highest rates of social housing in this state, and there are high rates of people renting their homes in Corio and Norlane. ABS data from 2021 tells us that 45.4 per cent of people living in the 3214 postcode rent their homes, as opposed to 28.5 per cent across Victoria. The importance of housing is something that residents in the Lara electorate know too well.

In my role as the member for Lara I have had the opportunity to meet many community leaders who are passionate about ensuring there are homes for everyone who needs one in our local community. One of those leaders is Clare Johnston, a mum and Norlane resident. Clare shared her story with me. It is a story of resilience and strength. She moved to Norlane from interstate when seeking an affordable rental for her family. Clare describes Norlane, which is ranked as Victoria's most disadvantaged suburb, as incredibly strong and vibrant. I have to agree with that description. The Norlane community is one of the most resilient communities that I have ever encountered. Clare describes Norlane as a place where people take care of one another. She says that Norlane is a place where neighbours know each other's names, share fruits and vegetables over fences and organise community events entirely through the dedication of volunteer members on a shoestring budget.

Clare has raised a number of concerns with me about the supply of social housing in our region. One of the points she has raised is the importance of delivering homes for people in the communities where they belong, making sure people have a place to live that is close to those they know, the services they already access and the community centres – like the wonderful Norlane Community Centre – that they visit for support every week.

Housing policy that delivers more homes in the places where people want to live is a policy that I wholeheartedly support. Clare is an incredible advocate for housing in the Norlane community and is passionate about making sure every Norlane resident has a great home to live in. She is also an advocate for mental health, and Clare leads Antifragile, a group that uses art to express and explore their experience of living with a long-term mental health related disability. Their exhibition uses these artworks to prompt a community-wide conversation on mental health and wellbeing supports, and I am looking forward to visiting the exhibition in October. Can I take this opportunity to thank Clare for her advocacy and commitment to making sure that everyone has a home in our community.

In my contribution today I want to touch on why our government's target of building 800,000 new homes over the next 10 years and the reforms underpinning them are so important for young people. For young people, finding suitable housing is harder than ever. It is harder than ever to find an affordable rental close to the things that young people need: access to public transport, education and

secure employment. It is harder than ever to buy your first home. This plan to build 800,000 new homes is about more than just the numbers or ticking the boxes; it is about delivering for young Victorians and providing fairness and equal opportunities for future generations. More homes means more opportunities for young people to thrive in the communities that they grew up in, close to their parents, their friends and their families; close to educational opportunities, universities and TAFEs; and close to employment opportunities where they can get their start in life.

I am honoured to represent an incredibly diverse and multicultural community. The Lara electorate is home to people from many different backgrounds, cultures and faiths. Migrant and refugee families in Lara and across Victoria contribute to our society, economy and culture every single day. They are teachers, nurses, small business owners, volunteers, neighbours, police officers, real estate agents and electorate officers. Under this Labor government, we will continue to ensure that our state remains a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. For many of our multicultural families, especially migrants and refugees, the challenge of finding a place to live can be even harder. Too often they are overlooked by landlords because of their name, their accent or because they are new to this country. That is not fair, and it is not the Australia we believe in. These families deserve the same chance as everyone else to find safe and affordable housing close to work, schools and their community networks.

These housing targets that we have spoken about – a goal of building 800,000 new homes in Victoria – are underpinned by a strong housing reform agenda. On that note, Victoria has introduced reforms to make building small second homes up to 60 square metres much easier, usually without requiring a planning permit unless special controls apply. These dwellings still require a building permit and must remain on the same lot as the main house. To add on this, the proposals also aim to enable home owners to subdivide their blocks, perhaps adding multiple dwellings or townhouses, with dramatically shortened approval timelines or no planning permits at all. These reforms are aimed at ensuring that more houses can be built so that we can meet our goal of 800,000 new homes in Victoria.

When it comes to renting, we have introduced reforms to make renting fairer for all Victorians, from banning no-fault evictions to introducing mandatory property standards to ensure that properties are safe and habitable for people to live in, and from prohibiting rental bidding that drives up the prices of rentals to introducing portable bonds, which I know will be so helpful, particularly for young people as they move from place to place.

While those opposite are blocking housing reform, Labor is getting on with building homes. They talk about a housing crisis while we are introducing legislation to address it and while we are building thousands of new homes for Victorians.

Victorians do not need empty promises from those opposite, they need homes. Only a Labor government can and will deliver homes for Victorians. It should be no surprise to anyone here that we heard from the member for Brighton today, who said that they will stop our plans to build homes in Victoria. The member for Brighton said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

We strongly oppose what the government has proposed with the activity centres. They will not happen in their form under a future Liberal government.

What the member for Brighton here is saying is that those opposite will not be building the homes that Victorians need. They will not be building the homes for young people to move into, to purchase their first homes near their friends, near their families, in the communities that they want to live in.

Of course there is always more to do. Housing affordability is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and our government is determined to meet it head-on. We will continue to build more social and affordable housing, protect renters and ensure that every family in Victoria, no matter their background, has a place to call home. Our housing policy is not just a plan to build 800,000 new homes. It is so much more than that. It is a vision for our state, a vision for affordable homes in the

places where people want to live – a vision for a fairer, more equitable Victoria that ensures the next generation of young people in Victoria can rent homes in the communities they want to live in and can buy their first home as well near their friends, their families, around the corner from where they grew up. It is about not just putting a roof over people's heads but giving people hope that they can build the life that they want to build in the place where they want to build it. I commend our government's housing reform agenda and our ambitious target of building 800,000 homes, and I commend this matter to the house.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (17:21): It is my pleasure to rise to make a contribution on this matter of public importance submitted by the member for Werribee, who I know has a genuine interest in this public policy area. It is a public policy area that members of this chamber will know that I have spoken on in almost every single contribution I have made in the past couple of years. The same cannot be said, though, of those who sit to my right. The Liberal Party have discovered housing policy only very recently. In fact if you go back to the 2018 election, they did not have a housing policy. There was nothing – literally nothing – on the table for housing in the 2018 election. Liberal governments, state and federal, and Liberal oppositions, state and federal, frequently have not had a housing spokesperson or housing minister. This is a very new issue for the Liberals. It is an issue that, frankly, is principally of their making in terms of federal policy settings, and it is an issue they have only come to very, very, very late.

We have heard some extraordinary things from members on both sides of the chamber today. We have heard about the doughnut from the member for Werribee, we have heard about neighbourhood envy from the member for Polwarth, we have heard about economic illiterates from the member for Gippsland South and we have heard that housing means having a shower from the member for Mornington. But I think my favourite was from the member for Gippsland South, that we are not allowed to call landlords landlords anymore. Well, what an ill-natured knave he is; what a bounder, what a cad, what a beef-witted hedgepig. Really, we should bring back all of the 'ye olde times' insults, perhaps. We should bring all of our language back to that of middle England in order to make sure that we do not offend the landed gentry, to which the member for Gippsland South seems so eager to suck up.

I want to take you through some of the failings from the Liberals on this, but do not worry, those to my left are going to get a turn too. I want to talk a little bit about the importance of treating housing as a human right, not as an investment class. As recently as the last federal election the federal housing minister Michael Sukkar got up at a Property Council Australia function and absolutely defended the importance of housing as an investment class – that that was absolutely critical to its success – and I have heard the member for Polwarth talk about the importance of the private rental market being a key participant in the housing market. Well, almost every single real estate investor is there for a tax-driven purpose, because if you actually look at the gross yields on a pre-tax basis, the gross yields for most rental properties ensure that you simply cannot make money on that investment. Most residential property yields sit at between 3 and 4 per cent. If they were 100 per cent geared, they would be underwater, and indeed even with moderate gearing they can be underwater. People are simply investing in this as an asset class in order to extract the tax benefit from that investment, namely that of negative gearing.

Now, that is a tax benefit that accrues to rich people, people with big incomes. And in fact the higher your income, the more of your income that is in the top tax bracket, the better the benefit you derive from owning negatively geared – that is, loss-making – residential property. And that is at the absolute core of the failures of our system, because it is treated only as an asset class and not as a human right. Housing is a fundamental human right. If you think about any mining project across the country, the first thing they do when they arrive is they get houses on the ground. And yet we as a government – governments local, state and federal – do not look at that as the primary driver of economic growth. If you cannot house the people, you cannot grow the economy; it is as simple as that.

And if we turn to the reforms of this Labor government, there are some excellent reforms that they have undertaken – no doubt about it. You are not going to get quibbles from me about making it easier to put second dwellings in homes. You are not going to get quibbles from me about making it easier to convert standard housing blocks into dual-occupancy, townhouse-type dwellings. They are all excellent reforms. But I just make the perhaps obvious point that you simply cannot live in a permit. We are hearing lots and lots and lots from this government about the increase in housing approvals. You cannot live in an approval. You cannot shower in an approval. You cannot grow your kids up in an approval. The reality is that without systemic, deep reform to the building industry itself, there simply will not be the uplift in housing that we need.

I admire Labor for setting a target as ambitious as 800,000 over 10 years. I admire the chutzpah of the member for Werribee for actually getting up and flagging that target yet again, because they are not within a prayer of hitting it; they are not within a prayer of hitting 800,000 in 10 years. I do not think there is anyone in this chamber who believes that they can hit 800,000 new dwellings in 10 years. There is not a chance that will happen, particularly because they have now picked all the low-hanging fruit, and where are we at? We are at 50,000 approvals a year – not houses, approvals. Fifty thousand approvals a year – the target is 80,000 a year. We have grabbed all the low-hanging fruit – that has all come in, do not worry – and every bit of work from here gets harder, because you have got to get into industry reform. You have got to look at the power of the CFMEU. You have got to make sure that you have decreased the friction on housing transactions. You have got to make sure that it is easier for people to downsize, to release the land we need to build more houses.

But what you have, due to the vertical fiscal imbalance in the Federation that our founding fathers so wisely set up back in 1901, is a systemic problem with states having all the spending responsibility and the feds having all the taxing powers. So up there they get to have a brain fart and write a cheque and say, 'Happy days; on you go.' But at the state government level you are faced with the very real and difficult task of housing people, educating people, ensuring people are healthy and building the roads, but you do not get the ability to tax income or profits. Income and profits are the easiest things to tax. They also happen to be the fairest things to tax.

But what we have is a situation in Australia where state governments are left grabbing up whatever tax – and typically levies – they can. They are not taxes that necessarily lend themselves to being progressive regimes. The friction that attaches to property transactions now is so high that you are seeing people refuse to sell, simply because of the taxation impact. So in just the same way you have people invested in housing for tax-driven reasons, you have now got people staying invested in housing or staying in their house, even though they would prefer to downsize, for a tax-driven reason. That is a real problem. And it is undoubtedly the case – you travel the nation, and it is undoubtedly the case – that the mood has soured on Victoria, and lots and lots of people are talking about this being a high property tax jurisdiction. If you speak to people in the property industry, as I do, there is no doubt that that is the perception. It does not matter whether it is the reality now; the perception is that Victoria is a high property tax jurisdiction, and it is unfortunate. I do not blame any state government for grabbing the tax revenue where they can because of the way Canberra siphons it all in and doles it out so inefficiently. But the reality is that if you are going to improve the circumstances for residents and people seeking houses in Victoria, you have got to improve the circumstances for the property industry.

So what should the state government be doing in addition to their permit reforms? Yes, it is easier to get a permit – good result. Yes, there is a bit of deregulation. Sometimes you do not need a permit at all – good result. I applaud it. But we need the micro-economic reforms. Where is the real deregulation? Where is the targeted skilled migration? Where are the requests going to the feds saying, 'Well, if we've got to build 800,000 houses, why don't we get ourselves 100,000 builders?' That is the sort of targeted, sensible immigration reform we would like to see. Despite much of the hysteria of the Senator Nampijinpa Price's of the world, we actually do need to see an uplift in migration if we are going to have any chance of being able to deliver the housing stock that this state needs.

Make no mistake, the national housing issue is a \$290 billion problem – that is a fifth of Australia's economy. It is a \$290 billion problem if you look out towards 2040, which is exactly where we should be looking. It is a massive, massive problem. It cannot be solved by government alone. It cannot be solved by any level of government alone. You need the private sector on board. You need to unleash the potential of not just government. We can talk – and I do not have time for it today – at great length about the failures of the Big Build program, but you have got to be able to unleash the talent, the capital, the skills and the expertise to be able to deliver a functioning building sector. We need more research and development from the state government. We need supply chain harmonisation. We need changes to the regulations to make it easier to get the inputs into the Victorian housing sector, and we need the state government to not be competing with the housing sector with all of its infrastructure projects. The infrastructure book is overblown, the housing book is badly, badly underdone and the very real effects of that are being felt every day by the homeless people who are crowded into my electorate of Ringwood.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (17:31): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening in support of the member for Werribee's matter of public importance (MPI), fantastic member that he is, and that is:

That this house affirms the importance of housing to Victorians and supports the Allan Labor government's target of 800,000 homes over 10 years, the reforms underpinning it and the skilled workforce that will deliver it.

Victoria's housing statement is about more than just building homes, although that is obviously an incredibly important component of it. I think we can all agree that the building of affordable homes and increasing stock to make homes more affordable is something that is incredibly important, but it is also about sharing the load. It is also about sharing the load that has been taken disproportionately by those areas that I represent, from areas like the member for Werribee represents, and indeed areas like the member for Point Cook, the member for Laverton and the member for Cranbourne out in the south-east represent. Those outer suburbs have disproportionately taken the load – and Yan Yean – of housing growth over the past 20 years. So this housing statement saying that 70 per cent of new dwellings, new homes, will be built in established areas near existing amenity – existing public transport in particular – and schools is something that I know is incredibly important and incredibly popular with my constituents, particularly in the Tarneit end.

We know that the City of Wyndham will grow by another 120,000 people over the next, I think, two decades or three decades. We understand that. But places like Tarneit and places like Manor Lakes cannot shoulder the bulk of that load over the next 20 years. They cannot shoulder the bulk of these 800,000 new homes over the next 20 years. The former Minister for Planning is sitting at the table and before he goes off – I am not having a go at him – there were precinct structure plans that were approved during his time out in the west, Tarneit North in my patch is one in particular, that I think were unfortunately planned incredibly poorly by council town planners. And then a lack of oversight from the department has meant that we have PSPs out in the west that we are now trying to retrofit infrastructure to. I can tell you from experience that trying to get a bus route through the Tarneit North PSP to make sure that people have basic amenity like basic public transport to get to the shops or to get to school is incredibly challenging because it has been planned so poorly. The cost to the state to retrofit that infrastructure is enormous, when we have parts of our city with existing amenity that can take and shoulder the load of some of the population growth that we are obviously going to encounter over the coming decades.

From my point of view, anyway, one of the most important parts of this housing statement and of *Plan for Victoria* is sharing the load, as we perhaps should have been for some time.

I have done a bit of reading today, watched some press conferences and also listened to the member for Polwarth's contribution. The member for Brighton in particular and the member for Polwarth are frankly displaying what despicable frauds they are. Out of one side of their mouths they tell Victorians – and they tell young Victorians in particular, who see no end in sight to their aspirations to own a

home – that they will support them into their first home whilst opposing every single project that may give them the capacity to do so and in particular that will give them the capacity to do so near where they grew up, near where their parents live and near amenity: near public transport, near schools, near shops and near roads. Whilst they say that they are going to help Victorians get into their first homes, they oppose their capacity to do it at every single turn. In fact I believe the member for Brighton may have called the projects and the activity centre slated for his local area an abomination. Letting young people have some affordable housing near a train station, near a tram – God help us – near a beach and near where their parents live is apparently an abomination. Every Victorian with the aspiration of owning their own home should look at that press conference and should read that media release or that article before they go to the ballot box in 2026.

The member for Gippsland South posed the question, as it says it at the bottom of this MPI: what reforms? Well, we will go through some reforms. Firstly, the direction, the promise or the understanding, as part of that housing statement, that 70 per cent of new dwellings will come within existing suburbs that can shoulder the load and that have amenity: that is a reform. Making it easier for builders, buyers and renovators to get permits: that is a reform. I agree with the member for Ringwood: you cannot sleep, bathe and raise a family in an approval. We need to make it easier to be able to get those permits that we need to be able to build more housing. Slashing stamp duty for off-the-plan apartments and townhouses, which will be amazing for those activity centres and those projects that are slated for Brighton, Sandringham and the middle suburbs of the east, is helping first home buyers and builders with \$10,000.

I know that the federal government has had a productivity summit recently up in Canberra, but the productivity in the domestic building sector is slothful. Ten months to build a new home is slothful, and it is for a few reasons. I think we have got some levers to pull. Workforce is one of them, without a shadow of a doubt, and a skills shortage is one of them. A lack of innovation is another, and the time it takes to approve these new projects is another. I think governments, both state and federal, have some levers to pull there in terms of skilled migration and in terms of some cutting of regulation or some streamlining of regulation to be able to get these projects and these houses built quicker. That is incredibly important. If we wish to reach a target of 800,000 homes over the next 10 years, we are going to have to improve productivity within that sector, and all levels of government – I will even throw local government in here, but they are usually the problem – have to work together to improve productivity, innovation and supply, of workforce as well as materials, within that sector.

I have spoken about the 70–30 split within the housing statement. Wyndham is expected to get 120,000 new homes as part of this, which is still one of the higher targets, but I would hate to think what that would have been without the commitment for 70 per cent of new dwellings to be in existing locations near amenity, because I can tell you right now between Tarneit West and Melton there is no amenity; it is rock and thistle and unproductive agricultural land.

So we cannot just continue as a state and as a society to build medium-density housing in greenfield sites away from duplicated roads that you can get around on, away from metro rail with enough capacity on it to carry those new residents, without schools, without shopping centres – without all those basic things that make a place livable.

As I said, I went out and spoke to my community about this, particularly those in Tarneit. They do struggle with an amenity deficit. Our government is working hard every single day to try and bridge the gap of that deficit, but it is there. It exists because we have planned estates, PSPs and suburbs without keeping in mind that people need that basic amenity to live the life that they would like to.

I could go on and on and on about this. This bill, if nothing else, is about sharing the load between those established suburbs like Brighton and my place of Tarneit.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:41): I am pleased to rise today on the matter of public importance (MPI). When it came through I had to check the date. I actually thought it was an April

Fool's joke, but apparently not. This is what we are here to talk about – 'That this house affirms the importance of housing to Victorians' – and the first line is the one that I am going to talk to at the moment.

Now, I am glad the member for Tarneit actually corrected the member for Werribee on a couple of facts, and it was quite interesting, especially around the precinct structure plans. The member for Werribee came out pretty hard on the former planning minister, the member for Bulleen, saying that he created the PSPs, he did this and he did that. How it worked was the councils actually did the work.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: You are absolutely clueless about what you are talking about. The councils did the work on the PSPs, along with Planning Victoria. The minister signed off on what councils wanted, and that is a very important point.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: That shows you how clueless the other side is when it comes to the history of this state. The member for Werribee also talked about the lack of investment from the federal government between 2010 and 2014. It is true; you are right. The federal government from 2010 to 2013 was the Gillard Labor government. It was not a Liberal government, it was the Gillard Labor government.

John Lister: Members are required to be –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have not called the member for Werribee yet.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, 10 minutes. Member for Werribee, on a point of order.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

John Lister: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to clarify that I said 'the federal Liberal–National government' in my contribution, and members are required to be accurate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Werribee, and you should know that. It was going so well, and I expect everyone to continue quietly.

Wayne FARNHAM: It is good that we get those facts cleared up before we start, but let us talk about the government's actual target: 800,000 homes over 10 years, which is in this MPI. In the first two years, the government is behind – not even close to the target. Look, I understand targets. I get that, but make your targets a bit more factual than aspirational. If the government had done their research before they set this target and opened themselves up to fail on the target, they would have known the most houses that were built since 1990 was in 2017, and that was 75,000 homes in 2017. That was before the ramp-up of the big build. So in 2017 there was the most homes ever built in Victoria – 75,000 homes. On average from 1990 to today it is 46,000 homes. If I was going to be the government and set a target, I would not have done it at 80,000 and made myself look foolish at this point in time, because that is what is happening at the moment. Even the Premier today in question time cheered and said, 'We have delivered 60,000.' It is 20,000 under their actual target. If I take as gospel what the Premier said in question time today, that they have delivered 60,000 over the last two years, that is 46,000 homes short of what their target is set at.

Now, the government can use the spin. They can say, 'No, no. We're saying 800,000 over 10 years now.' The original commitment was 80,000 homes a year for 10 years. That was in the original press release, and I am more than happy for any member of that side to correct me if I am wrong, but they know I am right, and that is why they are not going to interject on this statement. The government

talks about – again, going back to the first line – ‘That this house affirms the importance of housing to Victorians’.

I affirm that home ownership is important. I believe in it, and I believe our younger Victorians should have an opportunity to own a home. But that is not the government’s mindset. The previous Premier, Premier Andrews, actually said Victorians prefer to rent than buy – his statement, not mine. I do not believe that for one minute. I hear the government spruik all the time build to rent. They talk about housing affordability, but they spruik build to rent. They do not want home ownership. Every mindset from this government is about and every statement they put out is talking about rent. What about ownership? What about giving millennials and gen Zs the opportunity to own a home? But they do not have the opportunity under this government. Millennials and gen Zs now have the lowest opportunity to buy a house that they have had in the history of this state because of the taxes attached to property, the taxes attached to building. When we talk about the 60-odd new taxes that have been introduced into this Parliament since 2014, half of those are attached to the construction industry. The government have lost sight of aspiration, and our young Victorians have lost sight of actually owning a home. They have given up hope. If you talk to a lot of young Victorians, they would rather go on a holiday than save up for a home, because they believe they will never get the opportunity to buy a home.

As for the precincts that have been announced by the government, I am going to touch on them too, because that is an important part of their whole housing strategy. So let us talk about that. Let us talk about the precincts. The simple fact of the matter is that it is not a housing policy, it is a tax policy, and I will tell you why it is a tax policy. It is a tax policy because when those precincts go up, the rezoning will trigger a windfall gains tax. It is a tax policy. The development community has come out and said that it is not viable. The government are not going to build these high-rise developments. The government will not build them, so when the government comes out and says, ‘We’re going to build,’ that is a furphy. It is the development community that has to build that, but the development community is saying brownfield sites – honestly, mate.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Narracan can continue, but members at the table can have a chat outside the chamber if they like.

Wayne FARNHAM: So we have the development community saying that it is not viable to do brownfield development, so that is going to be problematic for the government.

Then the last part of this is ‘the reforms underpinning it and the skilled workforce that will deliver it’. That is a good statement, but I think we need to look at the facts of what is happening in the construction industry at the moment. Over the last 18 months we have lost nearly 25,000 tradies. That is our skilled workforce that are there to deliver these homes. We talk about training, we talk about TAFE. I hear the government talk about it all the time: ‘We’re investing in TAFE.’ That is great, but we are only having a 50 per cent completion rate for apprentices. There is another dent in our skilled workforce. Then let us look at the construction industry as a whole and let us look at the amount of builders that have gone into liquidation. In the last two years 28 per cent of all liquidations in Australia were in construction.

A lot of those, a fair portion of those, are actually in Victoria. So we are losing the builders, we are losing the skilled tradesmen and we are losing the apprentices. Where are we going to get the skilled workforce to deliver these homes? Now, everybody in this chamber knows I am a great fan of tradies, having been one myself – having been an apprentice, having been a tradie, having been a builder as well. Unfortunately, this matter of public importance, as great as it is to put it in writing and make it all nice and pretty and spruik about it in the chamber, is undeliverable. There is nothing in this matter of public importance that the government actually has delivered: ‘We’ve talked about it, we’ve

spruiked about it, but we haven't delivered it.' So it is one thing to talk about it, but delivery is a totally different thing.

In closing – and the member for Mornington touched on it earlier – I did, just before I got in this place, deliver four units in my local electorate for homeless women particularly. I am very proud of that and very proud of my community that also pitched in on that – \$300,000 in local and in-kind contributions, most of that labour and materials. It was an absolutely fantastic effort to help a growing cohort of homelessness in our community, which is women over 50. It is a problem; it is a bad problem. And people trying to escape family violence have an 18-month delay – now, that is a fail. That is a fail from this government. And to be honest, with the matter of public importance today, as I said, I thought it was April Fool's Day – it is a joke.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:51): I am very pleased as the Parliamentary Secretary for Homes to be making a contribution to this important matter of public importance debate, and I think that there is no more important issue than affordability of housing and the importance of housing as the fabric of our society. I felt quite a few value judgements, sadly, coming through this debate from those opposite. I have a huge respect for the previous member speaking, but I would like to reflect on his commentary around renting. Now, there can and there should be dignity in renting, and this government is doing everything in its power, with more than 100 reforms, to make renting fairer. In my community, in my electorate of Footscray, I represent one of the youngest electorates in this place. We have almost twice the state average of renters living in the suburb of Footscray.

One of the other value judgements I have heard throughout this debate is this sort of criticism of apartments and apartment stock or townhouses – that if you cannot afford to buy a three-bedroom house on a block of land that somehow diminishes your status. Well, I feel like places where we should be building more homes are in areas like mine, where we are benefiting massively from the investment of the Metro Tunnel. Footscray is a fine place to be building high-quality apartments. Of course predominantly we have renters moving into a lot of those apartments. I am very proud to represent those renters in my electorate. I am very proud of the reforms we have made, and renting is an entirely valid choice. We do not have to choose. I was a long-term renter, I lived in many a share house and rental property across Melbourne, and we did not have the standards then that we do now and the protections that we do now. I am really proud of the reforms being led by the minister at the table to make renting fairer in Victoria, because across Victoria almost 30 per cent of Victorians rent, and so it is only appropriate that we create the best consumer affairs environment for those renters and that we encourage high-quality builds in locations close to public transport and well serviced by infrastructure and public open space to create great precincts and great communities.

In my electorate of Footscray – and I am glad the former Minister for Planning is at the table – we have seen the contrast of what those opposite do when they have the opportunities and the levers in place of power, and of course I speak –

John Lister interjected.

Katie HALL: Thank you, member for Werribee – about the Joseph Road precinct, because of course there were no developer contributions provided as part of that massive precinct. Many of those buildings are still half empty, but we had to take those developers to court to make sure that developer contributions were paid so that council could build the roads and the infrastructure that we needed in that newest precinct in Footscray.

Not only do we believe in apartment and townhouse living, we believe in doing it properly, and that is the big distinction. I hear the member for Brighton use the word 'outrage' constantly – the outrage that people might want to live in that community and live in an apartment if that is what they can afford. Yet those opposite were very happy to put massive 40-storey towers in my electorate but not have the developers cough up the contributions to ensure that we had the community infrastructure and the public open space that every community should have the dignity of having, and now we have

to retrofit it into that space. We also know that people who are experiencing challenges even getting into a rental property need the support, whether it be through social housing or affordable housing, to have the opportunity to live in communities where public transport is increasingly important if they do not have a car.

I was enormously proud recently of attending a really innovative social housing development that has just been completed in my electorate of Footscray, in West Footscray on Summerhill Road. It was the Lions Club of Footscray – I would like to acknowledge their contribution of a large block of land. We had a great local social housing provider and then of course a contribution from the Allan Labor government to build beautiful apartments for women over the age of 50, who we understand are an increasingly vulnerable cohort of people looking for a place to call home. These are beautiful homes; they have got a large courtyard and balconies. The women that live there have really built a beautiful community together, and that is housing with dignity; that is the sort of housing that we support and that we believe in. Of course that reform was led by the incredible former member for Richmond, whose life was dedicated to social housing. The \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is his enduring legacy and something that we are continuing to see the benefits of in communities across Victoria.

Whether you need social housing or perhaps affordable housing or you are looking for a place to rent that has energy efficiency and where you can have a pet and the dignity of renting as well, we are making sure that whatever your financial circumstances are, you can live in a well-connected, well-planned community or housing, and that is exactly what the reforms announced today are designed to do. Of course consultation is continuing on those reforms, because community feedback is essential.

I know where I live one of the issues that I have been really concerned about is land banking by developers. That is something that I am going to continue to raise as an issue, because there needs to be activation of these large sites that have been left dormant for long periods of time for the purposes of permit flipping so that when the market improves, the value of the land improves if it has a permit attached to it. To me that is unacceptable.

As a government I am very proud of our target of 800,000 homes. Those opposites have mocked us, but it is certainly a great thing to have the aspiration. We are certainly building more homes than any other state in the country and doing that in a well-planned, well-considered way. But just on renters, the almost 30 per cent of Victorians who rent have had their backs turned on them by the Liberal opposition. If they ever seek to get into government again, well, I am sure those renters will turn their backs on them.

Motions

Budget 2025–26

Debate resumed.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:01): I cannot necessarily say it is a pleasure to speak on the budget today, especially when this state, as we know, is broke, busted and disgusted, because we have seen the government waste money like there is absolutely no tomorrow. You would equate it to going to use the EFTPOS machine to use your credit card only to find that it literally had no money on it, because that is where we are right now in Victoria. So there is no surprise that when you look at the budget and you gradually go down to the electorate of Caulfield and what is there for Caulfield in terms of where all the dollars are, there are not any, and no surprises there.

This is a state that really has spent so much money on blowouts. We saw the Big Build blowout – we are up to about \$50 billion in blowouts – and a Premier that before being the Premier was the infrastructure minister and was responsible for the Big Build. We have seen on the Big Build the corruption with the CFMEU – the expose that we have seen with Nick McKenzie calling it out on *60 Minutes* to say, ‘Here is a government that has allowed corruption to happen on these Big Build sites, which has caused an additional payment of about 30 to 50 per cent on every single contract.’

And that flows on to homes, because you cannot get a home built without paying a premium because the materials are diverted to the Big Build and the staff are diverted to the Big Build, and ultimately you cannot find anybody to work on a home. So the government has a housing plan with no housing and no money, and ultimately we are all paying the price.

We have a cost-of-living crisis, we have a housing crisis and we also in Victoria have a crime crisis. We have seen a government that has failed in keeping the community safe. In the budget that we have seen delivered, \$50 million has been slashed out of the police budget in a crime crisis. We have 2000 police short on the beat – 1100 that have not been recruited, 50 less police than were promised in the last election, 700 on WorkCover, 300 on extended sick leave. That is 2000 police. On top of that, our most senior police are taking an early retirement package because of an EBA, we have police that are exhausted, we have police that are also being diverted from police stations – 41 on reduced hours because the police have been babysitting some 500 protests since 2023. We are just about to hit 100 protests in the CBD. What does that mean? That means that the CBD, which used to be the world's most livable city, is now the most 'leavable' city. As a result of all of that, retailers are down somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent on their weekend trade, because our city has been hijacked by protesters. So welcome to Victoria, where we are not rolling out the red carpet but we are rolling out the right to protest and for extremists to go with it. No powers, no action, no care – this is a government that absolutely has done nothing.

If you look at the crime crisis in Victoria, whether it is machete attacks in your homes or whether it in the businesses where workers have been attacked with machetes and knives pointed at them and bashed and spat on, what has this government done? Absolutely nothing other than to say that they will look at worker protections by the end of the year. This was a promise during COVID, and now we are going to have worker protections by the end of the year. Well, welcome to Victoria. Every other state has worker protections except for Victoria. Then the retailers are asking for worker protection orders because retailers and workers are being held up with machetes and this government is doing nothing.

That is what we see in Victoria – a crime crisis. We see a youth crime crisis. Two young children were brutally attacked in Melbourne's west. The attackers are still on the run, and this government is just seeing it all play out. We saw the Premier missing in action for two days before she came out and said anything with a press release announcing that we would have another review and another taskforce. This is a government that is caught up in taskforces, and I would hate to cost out how much it would be to fund the taskforces. We are not funding more police, we are not funding more courts, we are not funding more opportunity for more businesses; all we are doing is seeing a government wasting taxpayers money at the expense of the community.

Victorians do not feel safe and Victorians do not feel supported, and Victorians are tired of a government that talk big but are weak when it comes to action. We are sick of weasel words. We are sick of a Premier that cuts a ribbon but runs away when there is a crime committed in Victoria. We are sick of that. Victorians are sick of that. When I speak to many of my constituents in Caulfield, for years we have been talking about having more divvy vans on the streets. With 150,000 people in the City of Glen Eira, we still only have one divisional van, when we can, patrolling the streets. We wanted more and we have needed more, but when I talk at the Caulfield police station or at St Kilda, at the moment their rosters are down 30 to 40 per cent. They cannot even get the one divisional van out on the road because they do not have enough police. So we do not have community safety.

What is the government's response? This budget has been able to fund \$13 million worth of machete bins, which are meant to keep the community safe. Well, the crooks are not handing in their machetes on the way from committing a crime – or maybe they are and are hiding the evidence; who knows. But it is not keeping the community safe. It is not making one iota of difference when it comes to actually tackling crime. We have got to take the machetes off the crooks in the first place. That is what we have got to do.

Other states have laws to be able to address this. Queensland have led the way with Jack's law. New South Wales is the same. This Premier will not even meet with the Beasley family to talk about Jack's law. They will not even meet with them. They will not even look at other states, because they are an arrogant government that say, 'We won't see what other states are doing; we know best.' Well, why is it on retail crime we are the worst? Why do we have every 50 seconds a crime committed in Victoria? Why do we have retail figures that show that not only that we are the top of the pops when it comes to assaults and retail crime happening in Victoria but every 12 minutes we have retail theft in Victoria, when the other states are reducing their retail crime? Why do we have tobacco stores firebombed in Victoria – 150 of them? Why do we have synagogues burnt down in Victoria? Why do we have that in Victoria? Because there are no consequences for the laws in Victoria. Weak laws, weak consequences, not enough funding for police and not enough police – it is very, very simple.

And then finally –

Steve McGhie interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: And then we are hearing from the member for Melton, who should look at crime in his own backyard, because that has completely failed.

Steve McGhie interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Member for Melton!

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Melton should be looking at crime in his own backyard because he is letting down his constituents. Melbourne's west is being neglected. The member for Laverton knows that. The member for Laverton allowed machetes to be sold at the Laverton market for months before taking them out – for months in Laverton. So Melbourne's west has been neglected. Victoria has been neglected. This government does not give a toss about keeping the community safe, and this government is a disgrace. They are an absolute disgrace. They can laugh in the chamber, they can joke, they can interject like the member for Melton does, but I would love to know what the member for Melton and every other member sitting in here is doing about crime right now. They are doing absolutely zero, and they have failed Victorians.

Steve McGhie interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: You have failed Victorians, Melton. That is what you have done.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Order! The member for Caulfield will sit down. Member for Caulfield, before you recommence, you did not respond to my call for order. All of your comments should be directed through the Chair. You should not respond to interjections. Particularly with the use of the word 'you', you are reflecting on the Chair. I would ask you to make all your comments through the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: As I said, this is a government that has failed Victoria in keeping the community safe. Every single member in this chamber has failed, along with the Premier, to keep the community safe. We have seen people brutally attacked on the streets, two children murdered. Where was the Premier for two days? In witness protection for two days. This government celebrate that and think that is a good thing. Do you think that is a good thing that the Premier was missing in action for two days?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Through the Chair, member for Caulfield.

David SOUTHWICK: Gone. The Premier was missing in action for two days. The Premier said nothing for two days – nothing – while those families grieved. Those families needed leadership. We have no leadership when these things happen. When your child is murdered and you are holding your child in your arms, where is the Premier? The Premier has been missing in action every time there is a tough decision to be made in Victoria.

Anthony Cianflone: Acting Speaker, on two points of order here: one is that the member for Caulfield is continually defying your ruling that he address you through the Chair, and the second point of order is in relation to the fact that this is totally irrelevant. We are talking about the budget here, as far as I understand it. It is a motion about the 2025–26 state budget. He is not talking about the budget. He is not referencing any budget papers or any particular subsections within the budget papers. I ask you to draw him back to the budget.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, that was a frivolous point of order. I have been referring to the police budget that has been slashed by \$50 million in a crime crisis.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Order! Member for Caulfield, I am going to rule on the point of order. On the first point of order in relation to speaking to the Chair, I do uphold that point of order. I would ask the member to direct his comments through the Chair. On the second point of order, the budget take-note is a broad debate and can reflect on matters that are canvassed in any part of the budget. I ask the member to continue but to make their comments through the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: It is obvious that this government does not like to hear the truth and is very happy to interject, because this government knows \$50 million was slashed out of the budget in a crime crisis. The 1100 police that were promised are still not hired, and the acting commissioner when he was asked by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee said it would take five years to get to full strength in policing here in Victoria – in a crime crisis. We have weak bail laws – in a crime crisis. We have police suggesting that this government is providing weak laws – in a crime crisis.

We have heard from detectives and we have heard from the current Chief Commissioner of Police that this government is not doing enough on tough laws in a crime crisis. We have every single failure pointing very simply to a government that is missing in action in a crime crisis. Only in the last few days, when we saw two children murdered, the Premier was nowhere to be seen for two days, and that is an absolute disgrace and a crisis.

No wonder this state is in disrepair. No wonder this state is in a situation where people are leaving in droves. No wonder we have African families suggesting that they have got to send their kids back to Africa because it is not safe in Victoria. Dr Ahmed, who I spoke to only a few days ago, said to me that this has been happening for a long time and that, unfortunately, he had been calling out that something needed to be done, and nothing has been done.

This is a government that has had its head buried in the sand, and this should have been a warning a long time ago for the government to do something. The government has done nothing. The government has failed. You see crime out of control. You see \$20 million a day –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Through the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: We see \$20 million a day in interest payments alone to pay down the debt that this government has created. This is a debt crisis that Victorians are all paying for. With \$20 million a day to pay the interest bill, it is no wonder that this government has slashed \$50 million in police, has not hired 1100 police and does not provide police with the resources to do their jobs. This is why Victoria has had a crime crisis under the Allan Labor government.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (18:16): I also rise to contribute on the motion and the debate about the 2025–26 budget. Perhaps I will change the tone a little and, as I am sure many of my colleagues are looking forward to doing, discuss many of the positive things in this great Labor budget. I am conscious that a number of other colleagues are keen also to talk about this great Labor budget, so I will keep my remarks perhaps just to 10 minutes this evening.

I do want to focus in that time on three things in particular that are very important to people in Preston and Reservoir. The first of them is urban greenery and tree canopy cover. My favourite sentence in the budget is on page 34 of budget paper 3, and it reads:

Funding is also provided for tree planting in open spaces around Preston and Reservoir stations to address the low level of tree cover and improve existing green spaces.

In fact we are hopeful that that funding will deliver a thousand new trees in that part of Preston and Reservoir and also the associated shrubs and green cover to really transform what is currently quite a sparse space.

I have spoken about this topic previously in this place, but if we look around Melbourne, it is very obvious that those famously leafy suburbs – if you think of Canterbury, Toorak, Ivanhoe, for that matter, or Kew – have tree cover levels that are between 20 and 25 per cent. If you include the shrubs and the ground cover, their green space is very significant – almost half of the land area. If you come out to Preston and Reservoir, it is a very different story. We have tree canopy cover of about 9 per cent and a little bit more in other green space. If you head a little further north of us up to Thomastown, it comes down to 5 per cent.

I think for a long time we have just accepted that the leafy, wealthy suburbs look like leafy suburbs, the northern suburbs do not and thought there was not much we can do about it, but I am hugely impressed by the action of our Minister for Environment in recognising there is something we can do about it. In fact with modern horticultural practice we know how to grow trees right across the north and the west of Melbourne. Indeed locally we have shown that with the level crossing removal projects, which have planted thousands of trees, shrubs and ground cover across our part of the world. Indeed we have shown it with our funding through the Green Links program, which has planted a huge swathe around Edwardes Lake and up along Edgars Creek, and our thanks to Kate Jost and Friends of Edwardes Lake and the Merri Creek Management Committee for their help on that planting recently. We have also seen that through our trees for the west initiative.

We just know that if we can get these trees in the ground in parts of Melbourne that have not previously had good tree canopy cover and have not really had those good vegetation levels, we can improve the environment, improve biodiversity, improve amenity, improve people's property prices and reduce heat effects in summer. There is a long list of benefits, and we can do it in all sorts of different parts of Preston and Reservoir.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

We were very grateful, as I said, to the Minister for the Environment for his work and his team's work in putting together that somewhat bespoke program for our part of the world, but we really look forward to that being part of the larger agenda I think he has to improve urban greenery right across Melbourne. I should just touch on the fact that that funding will also hopefully provide some trees down at Herbert and Bruce streets, which did lose some trees during the level crossing removal project. I should say in net terms we had a lot more new trees, but they did lose some in that particular location. I should acknowledge Louise Crow, who has been a very strong advocate for both planting more trees and also getting the plantings right where we have done them. We thank her for her ongoing advice.

A second topic I want to touch on is one that the Minister for Carers and Volunteers spoke about earlier in her contribution, and that is the \$18 million for food relief. We have a number of organisations that do fantastic work supporting our more vulnerable community members through their food relief programs. As many of us know, those programs do not just deliver food, but they are a point by which you can organise other important referral services for those community members. I do want to give a shout-out to DIVRS – Christina DiPierdomenico, who runs that great organisation just around the corner from our office, and Chloe Tredrea and her team, including a couple of great long-term volunteers in Paul Daly, who I understand has been volunteering with their food relief program for 15 years, and Sam Ferraro, who has clocked up 10. I should also mention the great work of Bridge

Darebin across the road. It is run by Chris Lombardo, but Amelia Barr runs their food relief program and their Friday community lunches in partnership with Quest Preston, who I think do a great job of supporting local community events and community action like that. I give a shout-out to their volunteers, Jacqueline Fennell and Margo Farrell, a couple of great volunteers on the Bridge Darebin food relief program.

Finally, Reservoir Neighbourhood House have a food relief program run by Kate Hatton and Vicky Boyle, again with some wonderful volunteers who I just want to recognise for their ongoing contribution to that program – Jenny Gailans and Margaret Styles – and of course Rotary Preston, who do all the food bank pickups. A thankyou goes to Geoff McIlvenna, Ruth McCall and of course Gerry ‘G-Man’ Lyons, the new president of Preston Rotary, for their work supporting the food bank and that food relief program. I am not sure if they are still running it, but Reservoir Neighbourhood House used to run a student pantry as well at Reservoir High, which was run by Leah Khalili. I do not know if it still is, but that is just an example of the great things they do with food relief.

I should let you know, Acting Speaker Hamer, I am actually raising some money for Reservoir Neighbourhood House on that note – something you might have seen. I am attempting to run every single street in Reservoir, which turns out to be quite an ambitious endeavour – it is a very large, established suburb with over 300 kilometres of streets. I am only about halfway through, and it is now September. I thank those MPs and colleagues who have donated to that little fundraiser, and indeed I thank Rebecca Sutch, Mick Ricardo, Margaret Styles and Henrik Jacob, who have also donated generously. I did promise that if I failed to run every single street I would double everyone’s donations, so I thank people for their generosity, but it has also made me quite nervous that I will now be forking out well over \$1000 if I do not get through all the streets by the end of the year. I will keep the house updated.

I should, just while I am talking about food relief, recognise not just the organisations I have just mentioned but Anglicare in Preston and All Saints Anglican Church down on Murray Road and Bell Street. And indeed the Salvation Army do a lot of important work, similarly, through Major Mim Adams and her team.

Finally, I did want to touch on a particular important grant that came out of the budget process for us, and that is \$150,000 for Lakeview Tennis Club to install lighting on courts 5 and 6, which have not had lighting. I have raised this issue in Parliament before, and we were very pleased and very grateful to the Minister for Community Sport that the funding did come through in this budget to address that issue. I want to recognise longstanding president Richard Cosways’ very longstanding advocacy – I think over five or six years now – on that issue. It would be great, as Richard knows, to actually get LED lighting across that whole site, which is something that we might look to do in the future.

I do want to flag something I have chatted with the member for Melton and the member for Greenvale about, and the minister at the table, Minister D’Ambrosio, might appreciate this. The one challenge with energy efficiency with our sports clubs is that typically the council own the asset but they lease it out to the normally incorporated associations that are the sports clubs, and then they make the sports clubs pay the electricity bills.

So through that mechanism the council do not actually have much incentive to put energy efficiency capital upgrades in place because of course they are not the ones who will see the savings. I do not want to disparage Darebin council, who do a lot of important work in the climate change area, but we do see around the place that challenge that sometimes it takes a little bit of extra effort to convince council to make energy efficiency upgrades. It has crossed my mind sometimes that perhaps if we just legislate to force councils to pay the electricity bills for all the sporting clubs, we might see those upgrades faster. No doubt that proposal would be very popular with the sporting clubs.

Finally, on that exact issue, I was very pleased, and I am sure other government MPs – in fact probably all MPs – were pleased, to see that the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund had another \$20 million

appropriated to it through this budget. As I was speaking about lighting, I perhaps should not leave that topic without pointing out that of course the Victorian Labor government is installing LED upgrades through grants directly from that particular fund. We will be chatting to some of our local clubs, including the Keon Park Stars, Reservoir United Soccer Club, Thornbury Athletic Football Club and many others, about the possibility of accessing that funding.

I promised I would keep the contribution relatively short, just to 10 minutes, to allow others to make a contribution.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: Actually, the member for Pascoe Vale encourages me to keep going. I will very briefly, on that note, recognise the free public transport for kids under 18. I mention it just because the member for Pascoe Vale joined me, the Premier, the Minister for Public and Active Transport, the Minister for Children and the member for Northcote at the great launch of that event. We were very grateful to have the Premier up in our part of the world.

This is a good, strong Labor budget. It is a balanced budget. It is a sensible budget. I commend it to the house, and I commend this motion to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:27): I rise to have a little bit of a talk on the budget take-note motion. In hearing about all the good stuff and the money well spent in the budget around metropolitan Victoria and regional Victoria, I do have a little bit of a different take. Down in my area of the Latrobe Valley we have had a couple of minor wins, which we have to acknowledge, and hardworking places that have been wanting upgrades and so forth now are seeing them in one particular area. Last year I stood here and spoke about the Commonwealth Games legacy, and I must say that we do have a particular development going on with the with the Commonwealth Games legacy. I am sure the community that is receiving this funding will acknowledge and be very happy that that is going on. Unfortunately, I do not think there is a lot of local participation in the works down there with this proceeding, but that is another story for another time.

I would like to talk about our road infrastructure down in the Latrobe Valley. I stood in this place late last year when I was afforded the opportunity to talk on the budget take-note motion and spoke about a couple of intersections which were earmarked for upgrades. Unfortunately, in the budget that was just handed down we still have not seen the opportunity for those to take place.

I talk in this place a fair bit about the Bank Street intersection in Traralgon. This is an intersection which was upgraded probably nearly close to two years ago now. Talking with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, there have been issues with the upgrade of the VicTrack line that comes through Traralgon, with the signalling system. So we have got a major intersection which crosses over the main highway that goes through Traralgon which does not have traffic lights. At the moment what happens for the people that drive through there at this intersection is they can go straight on. It does have the golf club. To everyone that has been to a golf club, you do have people that drive their golf carts from their homes. If they live within a certain distance, as required by the golf club, they can drive their golf carts, but they still have to traverse across the major highway. With no traffic lights there, we have had a couple of minor incidents, luckily. One that was not so minor involved a school bus full of school students going home, which was hit at that intersection.

The money and the continued upgrade that we need there are paramount, because it is, as I have said many a time, an accident waiting to happen, and we do need to make sure that those lights do go up. The upgrades to the signalling system, which have taken over seven years to complete, were meant to coincide with those lights coming on board, and that has not happened as yet. So the people of Latrobe Valley continue to wait. Although we have been waiting patiently, this is an intersection that needs to be upgraded.

The Lloyd Street intersection is a level crossing, and I hear members on the other side talk about level crossings here all the time and how the level crossing removals in certain areas around metropolitan Melbourne make a huge difference with the traffic flow. The one at Lloyd Street and Waterloo Road, Moe – we do not want a removal of it, but it needs a major upgrade, because at school times, at either drop-off or pick-up, or if there are major works that are going on at the Moe Racing Club, it is near on impossible to get across. When the boom gates go down, hopefully there are no cars stuck on the track. We have had that before, but then the cars are ramped all the way back, and it is an incredibly inopportune time for someone that is stuck there. This has been an ongoing concern from before my time as the local MP, but it is one that the people of Moe are waiting for and we keep asking for. The money has been allocated to do it and we have had part of the works, but we just do not get that commitment or the start for that to be able to go on.

What we do see, especially at the Bank Street one in particular, is that the way that the government has made it safer is to drop down the speed limit. So we go from an 80-kilometre zone, because we are getting up into a residential area, and it just drops down and we are travelling through there at 60 kilometres an hour. From what I can see, if we do have extra incidents there, it will drop to 40. For anyone driving along a highway at 40 kilometres an hour or even 60 kilometres an hour, it is a major concern.

Our public transport too – with that signalling system that I did talk about, with VicTrack, Morwell has a new train station. Well, it is a building opposite the train station that has been built and only recently opened. It has been built for two years and has not been able to be opened because of these signalling systems. At the moment, now that the signalling system is working, the trains can now come onto the other side of the track. We do have officers of some description in there – I see them, but I have not been in – wearing their fluoro vests. I am not sure. I do not think they are council. I think they might be V/Line people that are there, because what we do have is a lot of unruly people that are in that area, and it is like they have opened up a new home for them to go in and stay and loiter around. So there is great concern from the normal people that are trying to get on the train that there are going to be incidents there. So at the moment we do have, obviously, paid people – but I am not sure where they are being paid from – that are making sure that people are safe and moving on these people.

This leads into my next point about PSOs. We have PSOs on all train stations through metropolitan Melbourne. Obviously, with new train stations opening up, there are going to be more PSOs on that front down here. But we only have four places in regional Victoria that do have PSOs. One of the issues that we do have is our major towns need, obviously for safety, PSOs that are walking the beat. People who see a uniformed officer, one, feel safer. We hear about people in our crime releases and crime stats all the time that are doing the wrong thing, causing grief in main streets and, particularly down in my area, at bus interchanges. We need to make sure that the general public are safe.

I want to bring up a point about how we know this works. There has been a lot of conjecture: will it work or will it not work? We have just come off a major court case in Morwell – Erin Patterson, the mushroom case down there – and before the case started the police had things put in place so that they could actually stop and check people on the street. They actually had that visible presence on the street, and within an hour of them coming on and people actually seeing that the police were there or that a uniformed officer was there, we actually had the streets clean up. For the entire time of the court case that visible presence was there. I think that just goes to prove that the people in metropolitan Melbourne get that security blanket of having the PSOs on the beat. It is the same in regional Victoria, but we do need them also to be travelling on the trains in regional Victoria. It is legislation that needs to be changed, I know, but we need to make sure that we have got designated PSOs for regional Victoria that can travel on the trains and that can get off randomly and hold people to account that are doing the wrong thing. We have issues right across the place with safety on our streets, on our trains and on our buses, and this visible presence all the time is what we need.

I have got an education one, and I do see the minister at the table. This was one that we had last year, Minister, and it was the Victorian School Building Authority make-safe program that we had go

through our schools. There is a way that the schools need to engage if they have got concerns. What happens is, when the works need to be remedied and people come down to check out what is going on, these people are coming from outside Melbourne, so we need to have tradies and so forth that come down and actually check out exactly what is going on in the schools. That is fine, but then we need to be able to be housing those particular trades when we could be using local trades to come in and actually complete the works in the schools at a much cheaper rate – people that are living in the area. The further point I want to make is that nine times out of 10 the schools actually have to dip into their own money to achieve some rectifications on certain parts of their buildings. So we do need to make sure that if that is the case the schools are compensated in that area.

While I am going and I have also got the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission here, I may as well touch base on our area. It is absolutely great that I have been able to come in tonight and start it, and I will keep moving on. On our job front down in the Latrobe Valley, as we all know, and rightly so, the coal-fired power stations are closing down and we are going to renewables. That is what the people are asking for and what the people want. But my issue at the moment is job security for the people that are in the coal-fired power stations at the moment and the associated workers that rely on the coal-fired power stations continuing at the moment for their jobs. Families that are trying to make a living are actually being sucked up, not just those digging the coal up out of the ground but the village that is around that – the people that are dry cleaning all the uniforms, the people that are supplying the food and the people servicing the cars and all that type of stuff that goes on there. We need to make sure that heading into the future we have sustainable jobs, and not just jobs where the workers have been trained in the field and are earning good money to work in the coal-fired power stations; we also need to make sure what they are moving into are generational jobs. What I can see, if we do not have these jobs for these families to go on to – we are moving headlong into a massive build up in Queensland with the Olympic Games coming in.

We do not want to lose these families from the area that have lived in the Latrobe Valley for their entire lives. They have relied on either (a) working in the power station or (b) being associated with works that go on around the power station. So we need to make sure that out of these 59,000 new jobs that are that are coming we do have the set-up and the new manufacturing for our current workers to transition into but also for the next generation of workers, who would have been relying a few years ago on being able to step into that working environment, to make sure that we are set up and the government is not forgetting about these workers and their families. For over 100 years now the valley has powered the great state of Victoria, and I am positive that with the change in going to renewables, we will be powering the state for the next 100 years also. But we need to give the people the security and the knowledge that the government is not forgetting them and be on the front foot and say, 'Yes, we have the manufacturing jobs. Here they are.' We need to be up-front and be honest as we move through that transition.

As I said, last year I stood up here in this place and spoke, and not a lot has changed down in the valley in this current budget. We hope with bated breath that next year the budget will hold a little bit more joy for us. But thank you for your time as I have stood up here and spoken on the take-note budget motion.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (18:42): I also rise as the proud member for Niddrie to speak on the 2025–26 Victorian budget take-note update. This is an Allan Labor government budget that does deliver real and tangible benefits for my community in the electorate of Niddrie, which I am very happy to be part of and very happy to have been born and raised in. But not only that, it has investments across education, across infrastructure, across sport and across transport. The budget does build on our government's track record of investment where it matters most – supporting families, supporting services and shaping a better future for all Victorians.

One of the things I am most proud of is our \$19 million investment into Buckley Park secondary college on Cooper Street, Essendon. This is a once-in-a-generation upgrade that will include a brand

new STEM centre as well as advanced laboratories, robotics rooms and innovative maker spaces where students can explore science, technology, engineering and mathematics in modern learning spaces. The school, under the principal leadership of Harold Cheung, have worked very hard to do the master plans and the advocacy, and to be there to make that announcement with the whole school community that have been there for multiple generations going through Buckley Park secondary college was really, really important. It is a school that does need a refurbishment, and it will get enhanced heating and cooling and fully accessible entrances. It will be a transformational upgrade for one of the best local schools in the heart of my electorate in Niddrie. The students and teachers deserve the opportunities that come with world-class facilities, and that is what this funding will deliver.

As we all know, community sport is the backbone of every community. We know schools, education and community sport are those most important protective factors, particularly for youth that are growing up and wanting to be part of the community. I grew up in Airport West, and I was very proud to see that our government is investing \$400,000 in the Bowes Avenue community recreation reserve. This upgrade will provide local sports players with a safer and more modern space to train and play basketball and netball and to thrive. It is a real win for grassroots community sport and wellbeing.

Leading with that, we know how important is to keep our kids active. More and more we are learning about the dangers of iPhones and Samsung phones and the addictive nature of the dopamine hits that our mobile technology gives us. What I am so proud about under this Allan Labor government is the 65,000 Get Active Kids vouchers worth up to \$200 each to help families cover the cost of equipment, uniforms and fees, which we know are so important. These vouchers ensure every child has a chance to play the sport they love.

One of the most transformative projects for our region out in Melbourne's west is well and truly underway, and it is the development of the Sunshine super-hub, a key component of the Melbourne Airport rail link. Sunshine has about 70 per cent, I think, of the V/Line trains going through it. I and the member for Laverton were out there very recently. We know how popular airport rail is for Victoria, and we know that it will be a game changer for Melbourne's western suburbs. The member for Melton is also in here. We know airport rail is more than just getting business leaders and business community people to their flights on time, it is a transformative project that will help tackle transport emissions and bring public transport options to people that have only ever been dependent on cars.

The Minister for Climate Action is to my left here. The minister is doing a great job with climate action and the SEC. The trees for the west program is one of the most important programs that has ever been rolled out in Melbourne's west. We know we do not have the tree canopy of other parts of Melbourne, and trees for the west is something that is going to be so good for our amenity, so good for our lungs and so good for our health in Melbourne's west. I can see the member for Sunbury over there too. We have Melbourne Airport and trees for the west, and we are making electric buses a home in Melbourne's west. Something that I am very proud of too, which the Minister of Public and Active Transport is delivering and which I had a little bit of a role in when I was the Minister for Public Transport, are the new trams that are coming out to Melbourne's west. The only steel wheels I knew were the tram wheels of the route 59 tram, and they are very old. Bringing next generation G-class trams on the route 59 is going to be so important. Accessible public transport, and making sure that it is emissions free and supporting tackling transport emissions, is so very important. I cannot wait to be getting on those trams and supporting my local community with brand new trams in my electorate. That will occur next year.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the \$100 power saving bonus for anyone with a concession card to help ease the cost of living. We have had the most interest rate rises since 1989 – 12, 13 interest rate rises back to back – and this is a government, under Premier Allan, that is focused on the cost of living. We know the cost of living is one of the most important issues affecting everyday Victorians. We have done all sorts of initiatives, but there is no doubt the power saving bonus – and I get traffic through my electorate office on it – is something that everyday Victorians, from everyday Victorians to pensioners, appreciate so much.

I also want to acknowledge how important our road infrastructure is. In addition to our major initiatives, we are also making important investments in the local roads that are really key interchanges in the Niddrie electorate and also neighbouring Essendon. Our \$6.55 million investment for road upgrades along Mount Alexander Road, Napier Street, Fletcher Street and Russell Street in Essendon will improve safety, reduce congestion and ensure people can get to where they need to get to quickly and safely.

This is a budget that delivers for everyday Victorians – from cost of living, to climate action, to better public transport options and to support for our young kids in school and through local sport. I am very proud to be the member for Niddrie. I know the local community's priorities, and to be delivering another budget that will deliver for them is so important. Better schools, safer roads, stronger transport and a healthier, more connected community are what it is all about and what happen only under a state Labor government. I commend it.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (18:49): It has been 113 days since the state budget was handed down, and it is a delight to finally get an opportunity to speak on the budget that was handed down to the people of Victoria.

A member interjected.

Jess WILSON: I did run here, because I was so pleased to be able to give a contribution tonight. Unfortunately, the Labor members cannot go for the full time to even speak about their own budget. But we on this side of the chamber will speak about the impact of 10 years of financial mismanagement on every single Victorian. Now, it has been 113 days since the budget. If we look at the budget papers, the net debt this financial year will be \$167.6 billion. In one year the net debt in this state will be \$167.6 billion.

That means, according to the budget papers, that Victorians will be paying \$7.6 billion this financial year in interest repayments alone – not paying down the debt but just paying interest repayments. \$7.6 billion this financial year means Victorians are paying \$20.8 million a day of interest, every single day, in this state. As I said, it has been 113 days since the budget was handed down by the Treasurer, and that means that Victorians, since that budget was handed down, have paid \$2.4 billion in interest repayments – \$2.4 billion in the 113 days since the budget was handed down.

What could that \$2.4 billion fund? I am very, very disappointed that the Minister for Education has left the chamber, because that \$2.4 billion could have fully funded government schools in this state by 2028. But because of this government's financial mismanagement, Victorian students are not getting the education that they deserve. Our schools will be underfunded. We have the lowest funded government schools in the country. We have the lowest paid teachers in the country. You only have to look at the black and white in the budget papers to see why: 10 years of financial mismanagement, and Victorians are paying the price in the interest bill – \$2.4 billion since the budget was handed down in interest repayments alone. That could have fully funded government schools under the Gonski agreement – but not under this government's watch.

When we saw the government hand down their budget earlier this year, we saw a government that had lost control of the state's finances. We saw a tired government and a government that was incapable of arresting the debt in this state – \$194 billion of net debt by 2028–29. What does that mean? That means by the time we get to 2028 Victorians will be paying more than \$1 million an hour on interest repayments.

What are the consequences of Labor's record debt? This government cannot deliver the vital services that every Victorian needs. They cannot deliver the services. When it comes to education, schools in the electorate of Kew are falling apart because this government does not invest in their desperately needed upgrades. We see a government that cannot deliver simple road safety measures like pedestrian crossings or speed reductions because it cannot even afford to install basic road safety measures because of 10 years of financial mismanagement.

Where do we see this really starting to hurt for Victorians? When it comes to community safety. Under this government's watch not only have we seen record debt climb every single day, but what we see now is the crime rate climbing right beside it, because we are seeing cuts to Victoria Police. We are seeing Victoria Police not adequately resourced in this state. We are seeing cuts to crime prevention, and we are seeing a government that has completely lost control of crime in this state.

Every single day I hear from my local community and I receive CCTV footage of constituents being terrified in their homes because every single night there are armed offenders with machetes trying to break into homes in my electorate. What is this government's response? To weaken bail laws. The bail laws in this state are weaker today than they were in 2023 when the Labor government first introduced legislation to weaken the laws. What is the consequence? The consequence is that people are petrified in their own homes, and it is unacceptable.

It is unacceptable that this government has failed in its most sacred duty to keep communities safe. It comes down to the fact that this government cannot manage the finances in this state. They cannot deliver the essential services that Victorians deserve. They cannot ensure that Victoria Police are adequately resourced and able to have the cops on the beat to keep the community safe, to respond to the alarming rise of violent crime in this state.

I note that the Premier visited the seat of Kew today, and I hope that she took the opportunity to speak to the local residents, not just about her planned planning changes without the consultation that our community deserves, without taking into consideration their feedback. The Premier visited the seat of Kew, and I am sure she took the time to listen to the local residents' concerns, because they would have told her they were afraid in their own homes.

A member interjected.

Jess WILSON: It is not funny, member for Laverton. It is not funny that people are terrified in their own homes. Every single time we raise this in this chamber – every single time – the member for Laverton thinks it is amusing that people are afraid in their own homes. This is the job of government, to keep people safe. The Premier visited the seat of Kew today. Did she talk to the residents that are terrified in their homes, who have been victims of home invasions? The Premier has not even had the decency to respond the three times I have raised in this house over recent months these home invasions and what her government is doing to arrest the rising crime rates with violent offenders in our streets. Did the Premier listen to the fact that people are struggling under the cost of living in this state? Did she hear from my local community about how that is impacting them? No. The Premier likes to go out and make a glossy social media video but not actually deal with the real issues facing Victorians – the fact that they are terrified in their own homes at night, the fact that they cannot afford their bills because this government has mismanaged the finances and continues to try to solve the crisis by putting up taxes. We have the highest taxes in the country in this state.

This is a government that has lost its way. It is a tired government, and these are the consequences of 10 years of financial mismanagement. You only have to look at every single major project. The North East Link, affecting my community, is another example of where the government fails to actually listen to the local community. Residents there are awake night after night because of the construction. And what does this government do? It ignores their plight. This is an arrogant government that is more interested in saving itself politically than listening to the community and actually delivering the government services that every Victorian deserves. Enough is enough when it comes to the financial mismanagement of this state and the fact that Victorians will be paying more in interest repayments every single hour than is being invested into core government services. The fact is that people feel unsafe in their homes because this government weakened bail laws and is failing to ensure that the laws around repeat violent offenders are in line with community expectations. That is all we are asking – that they are in line with community expectations – nothing more. This government ignores the plight of Victorians and fails time and time again to make decisions to ensure that this state can actually fund those emergency services.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.*Adjournment*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Retail workplace safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (1310) My adjournment tonight is for the Attorney-General, and the action that I seek is for the Attorney-General to urgently bring in new laws to protect retail workers and tackle retail crime. Nobody should have to go to work and not feel safe, but unfortunately this is what is happening in Victoria. Every 12 minutes we see a theft, and theft is at a 21-year high. There have been nearly 5000 assaults in retail stores – up 21 per cent year on year. Nationally, threatening events have increased 30 per cent, but in Victoria it is up 52 per cent. This is an absolute disgrace, and we need to see action from this government to bring in laws and powers to keep the community safe and particularly protect retail workers.

Now, the Premier 480 days ago said new laws would be brought in to ensure workers are safe and protect them from assaults and abuse – we have seen nothing other than a press release. The Australian Retailers Association have put out their five-point plan, which includes worker protection orders, retail-specific abuse legislation, permanent police specific crime units, online reporting and knife sale reform in controlled states. In all five areas, there are big red marks where it comes to Victoria, whereas other states are acting. Victoria is going backwards, and that is why we see assaults up, workers not feeling safe and violent crimes being committed in these stores. We have seen in New South Wales and Queensland, thanks to Queensland, Jack's Law has been initiated, and this government will not even talk to the Beasley family when it comes to that. This government has failed on all accounts. I am asking the Attorney-General to act to ensure workers are protected. Workers should be able to come to work in a safe environment. We are hearing all retailers calling for it. It is an absolute disgrace what we are seeing at the moment with the assaults on workers and retail crime in the state that it is in in Victoria, and we must see action from this government, the Attorney and the Premier. The government can no longer talk about it. It is time for them to act. We want to see what this government is going to do to ensure workers can go to work safe, and that should be an absolute given. Unfortunately, it is not happening here in Victoria.

Bass electorate community sport

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:03): (1311) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is that the minister joins me in Bass to visit and meet with a number of our fabulous local clubs. Here we come together to celebrate participation, nurture the incredible talent amongst us and foster community spirit. This is where our kids play their first games with joy and courage, where volunteers generously give their time and energy – an inordinate number of hours – and where clubs create cultures built on values that inspire us all. We are inclusive, welcoming and respectful, proudly standing for those principles by encouraging positive behaviour and uplifting language, ensuring everyone feels truly that they belong. With equal courage, we call out behaviours that fall short of these values, because protecting respect and inclusivity is what makes our community stronger. We have and continue to invest heavily in community sports infrastructure programs and grants, for example, equipment, uniforms and clubs' strategic visioning, which are foundations for stronger, healthier and more connected communities.

Across all three council areas of Bass we have a few runs on the board in terms of infrastructure investment. Here is a quick run-down of recently completed ones, with more underway in partnership with councils and clubs: Koo Wee Rup Bowls Club; new pavilions for Wonthaggi netball, croquet, soccer and tennis; Phillip Island croquet; Inverloch cricket and soccer clubs; Tooradin Dalmore football club; cricket nets at Catani, Phillip Island and Inverloch; lights at Dalyston, Inverloch and Cowes that you can see from the moon; and to the delight of the Koo Wee Rup Netball Club, our

recent budget announcement of \$275,000 towards new courts and lights means they are on the way to proper fit-for-purpose and up-to-standard playing facilities; and major upgrades at Pearce Dale and Clyde rec reserves.

Speaking of Clyde, the Clyde Junior Football Club have just made history with their first ever premiership flag brought home by the under-13 boys team. They were loud and they were proud, undefeated all season, and are now the Navy 2025 premiers. Riley, Connor, Flynn, Abishaan, Jermaine, Kaizer, Kody, Jamie, Nathan, Luca, Kravitz, Jack, Brayden, Dallas, Jesse, Levi, Alex, Lennox, Hunter, Blake, Jaxson, Dev, Anthony, Flynn, Jai, Nate and Tyler – from the first bounce of the season to the final siren they have been outstanding. At every training, every contest, every tackle they gave it their all. To the incredible coaching team, Mick, Chris, Dale and Stuart, this premiership is a testament to your superb leadership, passion and belief. Congratulations to all the teams for a stellar season, with special mention to the fabulous under-14 girls, who got to the finals, showing roaring courage and teamwork. I cannot wait for next season. A big arm wrap around all the families who were up with the sparrows, cheering from the sidelines and supporting their kids at every turn. This club is all about community spirit. It is family, it is welcoming, it is inclusive and it is growing exponentially. I am proud to support them. Go Cougars.

Ovens Valley electorate small business

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:06): (1312) My adjournment is to the Minister for Small Business and Employment, and the action seek is that small businesses in the communities of Porepunkah, Bright and Ovens are desperate for an economic support package.

It is well documented what is happening in the beautiful community of Porepunkah. One of the largest manhunts in Victoria's history is going on. The Porepunkah community did not ask for this. They do not deserve this. This is a tourist town, a tourist destination. We are now entering week 3 when these towns have been devoid of income – no tourists, no income and no likelihood of change. The Victoria Police are doing their very, very best to find this murderer, and they have asked people to avoid the area, and that is for good reason. This is sound advice, and we all understand why. But respectfully, when a government authority tells people to stay away from a tourist destination it is fair to say the state government has a responsibility to support the town's viability, its economic stability and the people who call Porepunkah home, because these people in this community are still getting their rates notices and still paying their emergency services tax and their payroll tax, and of course their power bills do not stop because a manhunt is on in their town. We need support to defer the quarterly BASs, we need cash to help pay full-time wages and we need funds to ensure we can pay the landlords.

The communities of Porepunkah and Bright are close-knit and they look out for each other, but it is fair to say cracks are beginning to appear. Mental health support has been available, but may I say, for some their mental health concerns will disappear overnight if they know that their businesses and their livelihoods are safe. This disaster is unprecedented. When a community has a flood or a bushfire, the incident comes, it wreaks havoc and then it leaves, and then the clean-up begins. The Porepunkah and Bright communities have absolutely no idea when the clean-up begins, and they need help until that occurs. Minister, I desperately seek your support.

Lara electorate multicultural communities

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:08): (1313) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update about how the Allan Labor government is supporting young multicultural leaders across the Lara electorate.

This evening I have been honoured to host the Cultura multicultural youth council here in the Victorian Parliament. The multicultural youth council are working towards identifying community needs, developing project ideas and providing leadership training for young people. Geelong is very lucky to have these amazing young individuals, who are already leaders in our community. Recently members of the group bravely shared their stories as they took part in the Geelong consultation session for

Victoria's multicultural review, and this evening I have been able to hear from them about their ideas to build a stronger and more inclusive Geelong and how to reduce racism and discrimination in our community.

I am incredibly proud to be a member of the Victorian Labor government, which is investing in our multicultural communities. This year's state budget committed more than \$20 million to ensuring that all Victorians feel a sense of belonging and are supported to share their heritage and culture. That is why I am eager to hear from the minister about how our government is supporting future multicultural leaders such as Cultura's multicultural youth council.

Killara Road–Maroondah Highway, Coldstream

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:09): (1314) Coldstream residents, Coldstream fire brigade, the local shops and people across the Yarra Valley are still waiting for Killara Road and Maroondah Highway, Coldstream, to be upgraded. This is a vital road safety project for my community – indeed the entire Yarra Valley region – to duplicate Maroondah Highway, Coldstream, and make that dangerous intersection at Killara Road safer with traffic lights.

For around nine years I have been campaigning together with the community for this road project, and I will not ever stop doing so. The Victorian Liberals pledged traffic lights and worked with the former federal MP Tony Smith to secure \$20 million in funding back in 2019 dedicated to this exact road project.

So for six years the Andrews and Allan Labor government have sat on this funding, and frankly the excuse they have been peddling for years now, that it is still in the planning phase, is just utterly ridiculous. Coldstream, Yering and Gruyere residents, the Coldstream CFA and Gruyere CFA, fire brigades and local traders – in fact, people right across the Yarra Valley – deserve certainty from the Victorian government and its Department of Transport and Planning about the long-awaited Maroondah Highway, Coldstream, project and when it will finally emerge from that protracted planning phase into actual works to get this vital road safety project done.

So the matter I raise is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to inform me of the date on which the project scope and construction schedule will be made public for my community, noting this was promised by the minister for the 2025 calendar year – that is right. On the parliamentary record, in response to me raising this issue last year in adjournment matter number 955, the minister stated that the government's transport department was reviewing designs and promised that the project scope, updated construction schedule and temporary road work impacts would be shared with the community in 2025.

There are only three and a half months left in 2025. There is still no timeframe and construction schedule confirmed – it is a disgrace – despite Commonwealth funding being handed over six years ago. My community is desperate for information about the project – whether it has been approved for the works to start, whether there has been a tender done, whether there has been a contractor appointed, when community consultation will occur and basically when the Maroondah Highway, Coldstream, project will just be done. Ultimately, what our community demands is for the road project to actually be delivered and for it to be upgraded without further delay. Again, dare I say, it is only a Victorian Liberal government that will deliver this road project for Coldstream, and I invite the Labor government to prove me wrong on that. I will never give up campaigning for the Maroondah Highway and Killara Road, Coldstream, road safety project to be done.

Virtual women's health clinic

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:12): (1315) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is an update on how the virtual women's health clinic has benefited constituents in the Bellarine since its launch in July this year. The virtual women's clinic is a significant step forward in ensuring women and girls across Victoria have access to expert timely medical advice

and support, regardless of where they live. It provides specialist care across a wide range of health needs, including endometriosis, pelvic pain, menstrual health, cervical screening, menopause, breast health and abortion care. By removing barriers such as long travel distances and wait times, the clinic delivers accessibility, confidential advice and high-quality care to those who need it most.

This initiative is part of the Victorian government's broader nation-leading investment in women's health, including the rollout of public IVF services, providing families with a fairer chance of starting and growing a family. There is the expansion of dedicated women's health clinics across the state and also, excitingly, the new construction of the women's and children's hospital in Geelong, which will serve the Bellarine and our region for generations to come. Equally important is the government's free pads and tampons program, first introduced into public schools and now available in many public places, including three libraries across the Bellarine, to help combat period poverty and promote dignity for all women and girls. I look forward to hearing from the minister and sharing with my community how the virtual women's clinic has supported local women and girls since its launch and how it will continue to do so into the future.

Fossil fuel advertising

Tim READ (Brunswick) (19:13): (1316) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is that the Victorian government ban fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship in public schools. Currently the Department of Education has two key policies limiting what certain private companies and organisations can do in schools. The sponsorship policy sets out rules for school sponsorship activities, like contributing money in exchange for logo placement or public acknowledgement, whereas the advertising policy regulates things like a company buying space in a school newsletter or a billboard at a sporting event. In both cases the department's policy rightly stipulates that no arrangement can be entered into with tobacco companies, gaming venues or companies selling or promoting alcohol. Additionally, the advertising policy blocks anything involving violence or other content inappropriate for school age children, while the sponsorship policy blocks companies promoting firearms and unhealthy food, as well as religious organisations, political parties and unregistered charities.

The reasons for these restrictions are obvious. Schoolchildren should not be subject to marketing from any company or organisation that is inappropriate for their age and development, including predatory, harmful industries that threaten their health and wellbeing, especially not on school grounds. But at the moment fossil fuel companies are free to sponsor and advertise in schools to their heart's content. Fossil fuels – now there is a harmful industry that threatens children's health and wellbeing. According to the UN, by the time a child in primary school today reaches retirement age they will be living in a world 3.1 degrees above pre-industrial levels if we keep letting fossil fuel companies have their way. That means instead of pottering in the garden and taking the grandchildren out for ice cream, they will be struggling to survive in a world of even more brutal heatwaves, bushfires and floods, trying to remember what the Great Barrier Reef was like and watching millions flee as major cities around the world sink below sea level.

Currently Ampol is sponsoring a schools competition where each state winner receives a \$1000 gift card to spend at the petrol station. BP uses Minecraft to market its brand and petrol stations directly through the video game's links with the STEM curriculum in dozens of Australian schools. Coal and resources lobby groups offer free education materials and teacher training full of greenwash and spin, including books for kindergarten children and educational programs about so-called renewable gas. It is all part of normalising this harmful industry to make it appealing for kids, just like the tobacco companies used to do. But this government can take an important step to stop it by updating the sponsorship and advertising policies to stop fossil fuel companies marketing themselves in our public schools.

Werribee electorate bus services

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

John LISTER (Werribee) (19:16): (1317) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is an update on the start of services for the new bus service to Harpley. The communities around Harpley, Cornerstone and Manor Lakes North estates are brilliant and diverse and want to use active and public transport. As someone who has grown up travelling on our buses in Wyndham to get around, I understand this desire. It means we can leave our car at home and do not have to rely on putting petrol into the car every week with that expense, and it is just a good way to get around our growing community. I want to thank the constituents who have come to me at my constituent cafes or writing to me, expressing how this new route will assist them, and to recognise them here tonight. Mahtob, Amy, Reece, Joanne, Angela, Dennis, Althoz, Hari, Maria, Suvrat, Chris and Ranjith, thank you for being in touch with me, and I look forward to working with you on this next step in rolling this bus route out.

Last week I was pleased to share with the community the draft route for the new 194 bus route through Harpley. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and our community is ready to hop on the new service. In reflecting on that new draft route with the constituents I met with last week, it runs frequent services along main roads to make sure that we can meet those train services at Wyndham Vale and get people to where they want to go sooner. I am proud to work in a government to help deliver new and upgraded bus routes for my community.

In addition to the work being done on the 194, I was proud to see this year's budget include funding for an extension of the 441 to Kings Leigh estate and an uplift to services on the routes 170, 180, 190 and 192, one of my favourite bus services. The uplift has come on line a few weeks ago, and we are already seeing the benefits of those more frequent services, particularly during peak time. We will also see further improvements for the route 153 in the coming months with the opening of our new Wyndham law courts and that more rapid service between Werribee station and the new law courts on Princes Highway. I understand the services on the 194 in Harpley were slated to start in the first half of 2026, and I would appreciate the minister's update on that timeframe.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:19): (1318) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Government Services; however, I also appreciate that the Minister for Emergency Services is at the table as well, and this may fall within their portfolio. The action I seek is that the CFA volunteers are provided with paper copies of the rebate application form for the emergency services tax.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund has already begun, and it is adding enormous financial pressure to people across my region after rates notices recently arrived in mailboxes. Unfortunately, the promises of a rebate for CFA volunteers have done little to reduce the frustrations within my community, with several local firefighters reaching out to me over difficulties with the application process. I have had more than 30 complaints about how difficult it is. Paul Quirk of Murchison called it 'extremely cumbersome and time consuming'. Fiona Parton of the Whitegate CFA brigade said, after her and fellow volunteers spent over half an hour just to try and verify their ID, it was clear the application process was developed to be as troublesome as possible to prevent many of our members from even attempting to apply. Bill from Benalla said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The process for applying for volunteers rebate is going to be so challenging for too many of our CFA volunteers who, like me, are not very computer literate.

Many of these volunteers do not have computers, and even more, they do not have functional internet in some cases, while others are simply not tech savvy enough to navigate through the convoluted

application process – nine pages long, to be precise. It is quite difficult even for someone who can use a computer quite well. On top of this the leadership and administrators of CFA brigades have been provided with no support to assist their volunteers, leaving them just as in the dark as those trying to apply.

By allowing volunteers to apply with a printed paper form we could ensure so many of our volunteers are able to access this much-needed rebate. I understand this might not be the government's goal, but it is easy to see why our CFA volunteers are so frustrated with the government. Remember this is a \$3 billion tax over the coming years and it is targeting our CFA volunteers. Not only have they been staunchly against this cruel tax in the first place, but now they are having to struggle through yet another overly complicated form to access their deserved rebates. We have seen how difficult this application process has been for drought support – so much so that I am offering support sessions out of my office later this month, with trained professionals available to help.

More than 2000 CFA volunteers who took part in the annual Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria survey made their opinions clear: they feel undervalued and ignored by the Allan Labor government. If this government wants to win even the smallest amount of trust back from our volunteers in regional communities, they must act now and make this application process genuinely accessible or do what the Liberals and Nationals have called for and scrap the tax entirely. Our CFA volunteers deserve respect and not red tape, and providing a simple paper-based option is the very least that this government can do.

Footscray Hospital

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:22): (1319) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the services that will soon be provided when the new Footscray Hospital opens very, very soon. I had the privilege of taking about 50 folks from my local community recently to see inside the hospital in all of its glory – yes, it is absolutely glorious inside that hospital. I have to say it was absolutely amazing to see so many people wide-eyed and amazed at the scope of what we have been able to deliver in Footscray – people from all different community groups in my electorate, like the West Sunshine multicultural senior citizens group, a fantastic group of elderly community members from all different backgrounds, including Greek, Italian, Turkish, Maltese and more. They were amazed to see what an improvement this hospital will be over the current site on Gordon Street. We are talking about new state-of-the-art hospital wards. Some of those attending were actually even having a poke and feeling how comfortable the hospital bed mattresses will be – elderly people, who probably think about the next stint that they will be having in hospital, and it will be in Footscray Hospital. In fact there are going to be more than 500 inpatient beds on the site. Mental health and drug and alcohol services, which we know are critical for so many Victorians, will operate out of here.

This is not to mention the incredible connectivity and synergy with Victoria University. We had staff and students from Sunshine College, Braybrook College and Caroline Chisholm Catholic College, many of whom are looking at careers in medicine – very smart kids – and in nursing, who are excited about the learning and the career opportunities that the hospital represents for them. These proud westies are just some of the people in the community we have built this hospital for, and they are giving it the big thumbs up.

Starting from early next year, in February in fact, all of Melbourne's west will be able to benefit from this major investment in our hospital services, which is why I would like the minister to update me on the services that will be provided at this new hospital when it opens next year.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:24): The member for Caulfield asked the Attorney-General to bring in legislation protecting retail workers. The member for Bass sought that the Minister for Community

Sport visit her beautiful community and visit with many fantastic, inclusive sporting clubs – and congratulations to the Clyde Junior Football Club for their under-13s football team grand final win. The member for Ovens Valley asked the Minister for Small Business and Employment for economic support for the community of Porepunkah, particularly small business. I agree with the member that that is a beautiful part of our state and ask him to please pass my respects on to this community. The member for Lara's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action she sought was for an update regarding the support the government is providing for young people in multicultural communities. The member for Evelyn sought for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to inform the member when the Maroondah Highway and Kalinda Road intersection road safety project will be delivered.

The member for Bellarine had a matter for the Minister for Health, seeking an update on the success of Bellarine's new virtual women's health clinic. The member for Brunswick's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Education, seeking that the Department of Education ban any fossil fuel sponsorship in public schools. The member for Werribee asked the Minister for Public and Active Transport to provide an update regarding increased bus services on a number of routes – there were that many I could not keep up with them, member for Werribee – as well as the new 194 draft bus route in his community. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Government Services seeking for CFA volunteers to be provided with a paper copy of the rebate form and possibly assistance for applications for the rebate for the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, and I will also pass that on to the Treasurer. The member for Laverton is seeking for the Minister for Health to update her on the services that will be provided at the soon to be opened new Footscray Hospital, which looks amazing. I will ensure that these are all passed on to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:26 pm.